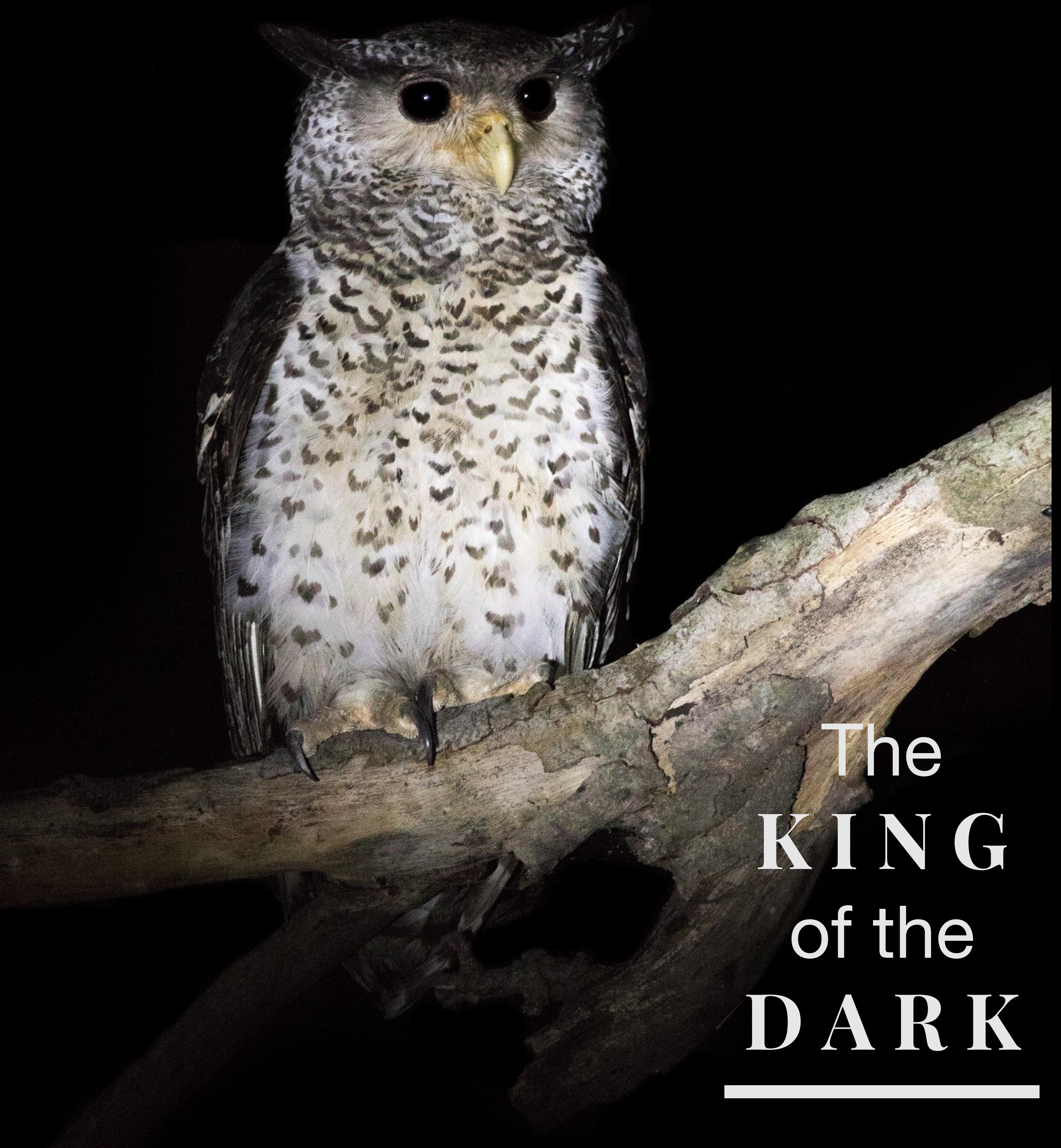
ISSUE 04 | NOVEMBER 2017

ARANYA

BY

Hyderabad Birding Pals | Friends of Flora & Fauna



The KING of the DARK

In this issue

October is a month of increased sightings of migratory birds- Waders, Warblers, Forest birds, Raptors and other waterfowls. Though the rains continued for initial days, the sightings did not disappoint birders. HBP organized five free birdwalks on Sundays of the month. This month major locations were covered like Ananthagiri Hills and Uma Maheshwaram. Each birdwalk had unique sightings- Rusty tailed Flycatcher in Narsapur Birdwalk, Blue Throated Blue Flycatcher in Ananthagiri Hills bird walk and Large billed Leaf Warbler in Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary bird walk. Habitats like Forests, Grasslands and Wetlands were covered.

Members also gave personal visits to various locations and had a wonderful experience. Spot bellied Eagle Owl was seen in Amarabad Tiger Reserve after a long time by members in one such trip. This makes this issue’s cover story. Good numbers of shorebirds and waders were reported from Hope Island near Kakinada. Eastern Orphean Warbler was reported from Osmania University and Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher from the campus of National Police Academy. Finally, after a prolonged search, Great Indian Bustard was seen by HBP members.

After starting the Book Reviews section, we introduce 'What’s in my camera bag’ section in which one photographer from HBP will tell about his camera gear and things he keeps in his camera bag. Further, there is a piece about tips for making bird photography better.

This month was good in terms of sightings and experiences. Hope you enjoy reading this issue and let us know your feedback.

Happy Birding

- Ajinkya Supekar

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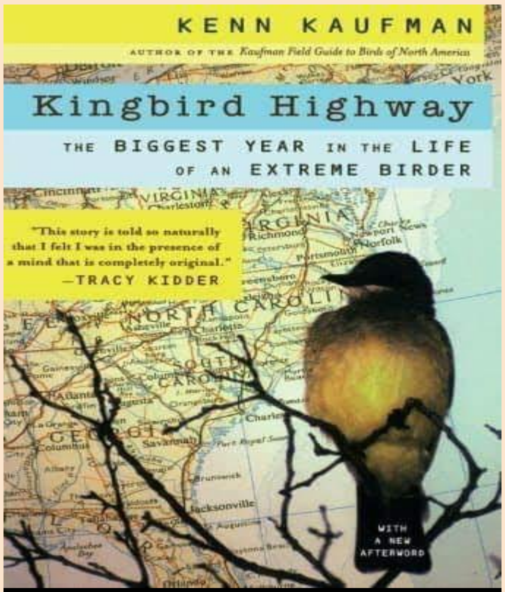

KENN KAUFMAN
AUTHOR OF THE Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America
Kingbird Highway
THE BIGGEST YEAR IN THE LIFE OF AN EXTREME BIRDER
"This story is told so naturally that I felt I was in the presence of a mind that is completely original."
—TRACY KIDDER
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

Book Review 29

HBP Bird Walks in October

171th Bird Walk | Narsapur Forest

1st October 2017

172nd Bird Walk | Anantagiri Hills

8th October 2017

173rd Bird Walk | Manjeera Reservoir

15th October 2017

174th Bird Walk | Ameenpur lake

22nd Ameenpur 2017

175th Bird Walk | Uma Maheshwaram

29th October 2017

Narsapur Forest Trip Report

By Manoj Kumar Vittapu

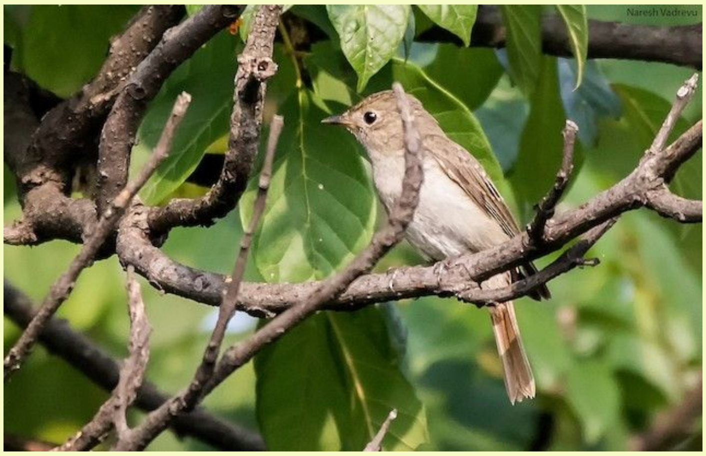
171th Bird Walk at Narsapur Forest
Sunday, 1st October 2017

The road to Narsapur has thick forest which occupies over 30 Sq. km between Gummadidala and Narsapur towns. It is 45 km north from Hyderabad city and nearby land mark is Dundigal Airforce Academy. It is known for its biodiversity which is sadly on a decline due to human activities. More than 225 species of birds are reported here. In the forest, close to the road there is a reservoir giving sightings of many waterfowls.

Hyderabad Birding Pals conducted its 171th bird walk here, ten members participated. This birdwalk was organized to see for the arrival of winter migrants. The weather was pleasant and sunny.

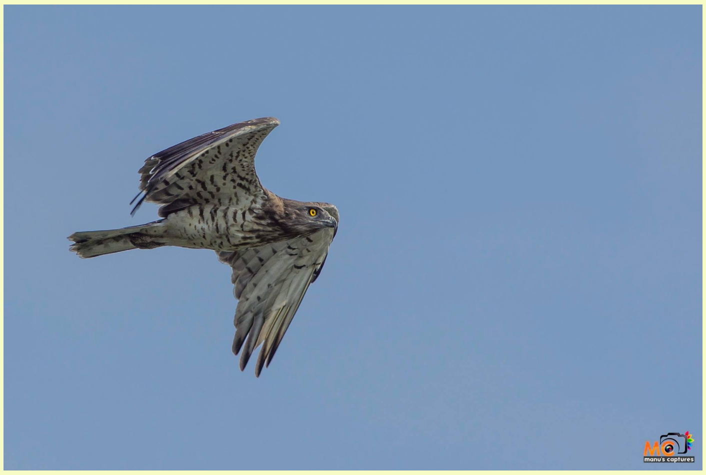
After parking cars near the temple close to road, we went to the lake. Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, Cotton Pygmy-Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*, Garganey *Spatula querquedula* and Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* were seen. There were some Cormorants, Egrets and Herons were also there. As the day progressed sightings of raptors increased, Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*, Crested Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus*, Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* and Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* flew in the sky. More than 100 Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* were in one large group.

During the birding in the forest, sightings started of Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Lalage melanoptera*, Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*, three species of Kingfishers, many Shrikes and Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*. On an exposed branch Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Ficedula ruficauda* was photographed which was an interesting sighting.



Rusty Tailed Flycatcher,
Muscicapa ruficauda

The bird walk was wrapped up before noon with a species count of 100. Thus Narsapur forest gave us wonderful sightings after a gap of some bird walks.



Short toed snake eagle,
Circaetus gallicus

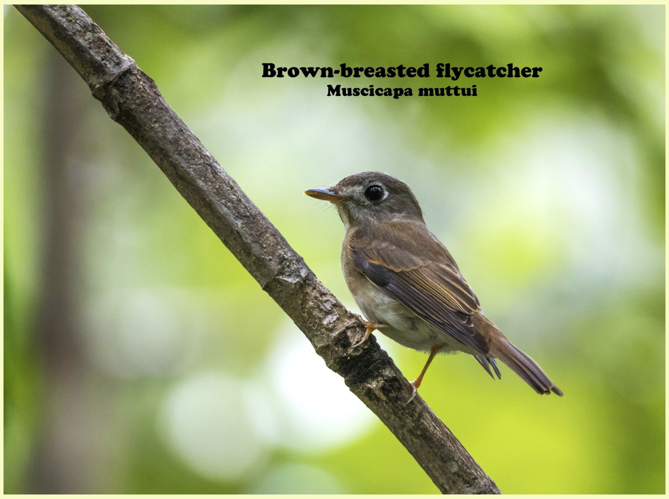
Ananthagiri Hills Trip Report

By Hari Krishna Adepu

172nd Bird Walk at Ananthagiri Hills
Forest,
Sunday, 22nd October 2017

Ananthagiri Hills, located in Vikarabad, Telangana, is one of the dense forests in the state of Telangana. It is one of the earliest habitat areas, and is known to be the birthplace of Musi river. It hosts a rich habitat to various species of birds, and other animals, and is always full of surprises when it comes to birding. The bird walk was planned keeping in view the arrival of the migrant species. It was a cloudy day, with a heavy rain forecast.

The walk started at 7AM from the temple premises and we were welcomed by a Grey Wagtail perched on the fencing around the water body. After scanning the area for the first few minutes, we headed towards the forest area to search for Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* and Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* which, unfortunately were not present. Overall, the activity seemed quite less because of the rains, and we started getting disappointed. We went further inside, hearing all the calls and chirps, and, voila, the Brown-Breasted Flycatcher came and perched on a tree right in front of us, giving us ample time to click some great pics. Even Tickle's Blue Flycatcher was nearby. It started drizzling by then and all of us took shelter under the huge banyan tree and were waiting for the rain to stop, while, observing the Indian Paradise Flycatcher flying around us. We expected increase in bird activity after rain stops. The rain finally stopped after about 45 mins and we continued with our birding, and, again, a pair of Brown-breasted Flycatchers started playing around, giving us different poses on different perches. It was as if they came just to pose for us.

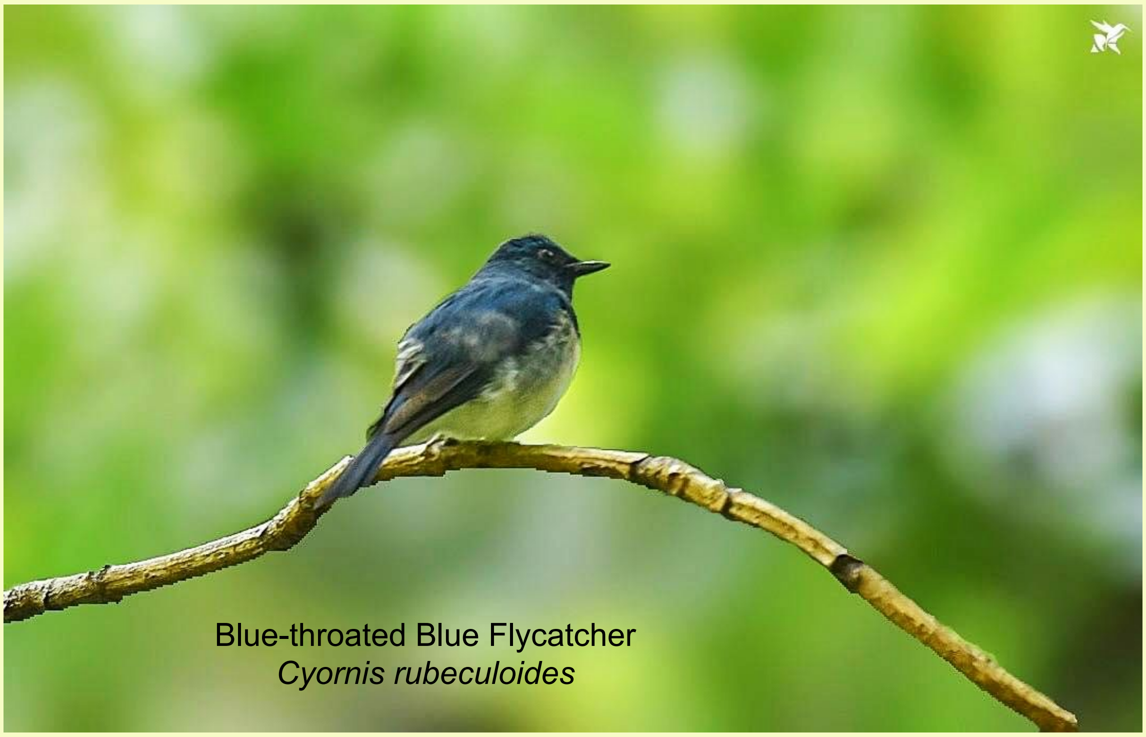


While everyone were busy clicking these birds, RK Balaji saw a different flycatcher and decided to check what it was. He clicked it and it turned out to be Blue throated Blue Flycatcher. A pair of Cinereous Tit was seen and Tawny bellied Babbler was seen with a catch. White naped Woodpecker and Shikra were seen while returning towards temple.

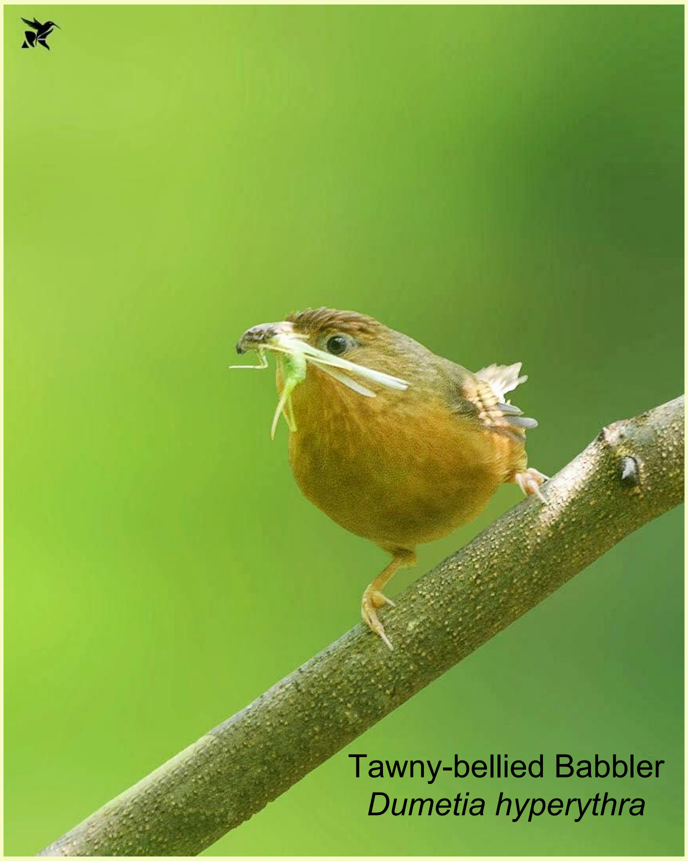
We decided to call it a day, and were heading back, when we spotted the White-naped Woodpecker, busy pecking on a tree branch. We were waiting for quite sometime for it to come out in the open so that we can click some good pictures of it, and, yes, it did come out and posed for us for a few moments before disappearing into the forest. Overall, it was a satisfactory day, with a total count of 59 species.

White-naped Woodpecker
Chrysocolaptes festivus

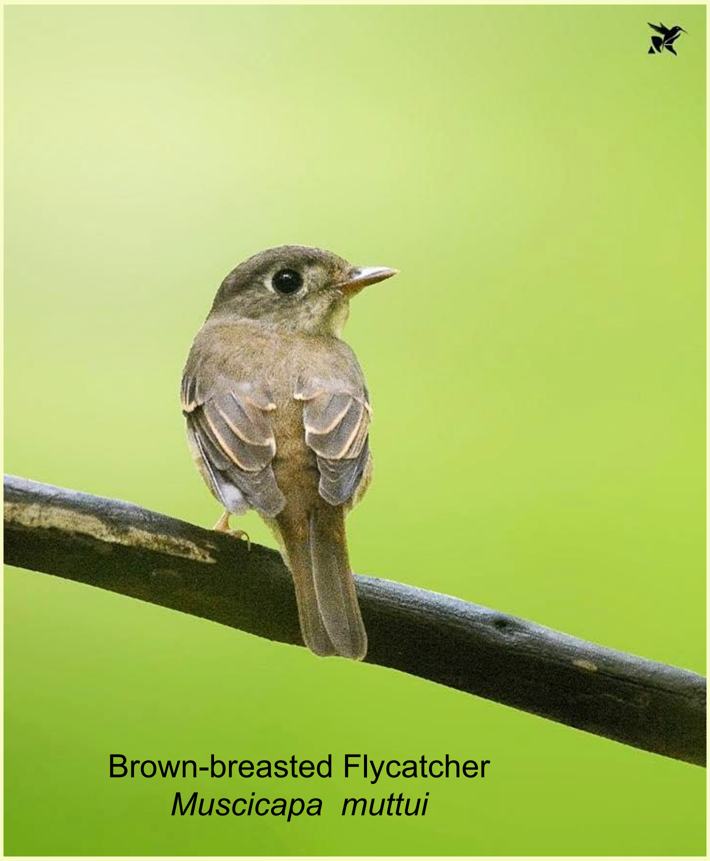
Ananthagiri Hills Trip Report



Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher
Cyornis rubeculoides



Tawny-bellied Babbler
Dumetia hyperythra



Brown-breasted Flycatcher
Muscicapa muttui

Photographs by RK Balaji

Manjeera Reservoir Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar

173rd Bird Walk at Manjeera Reservoir
Sunday, 15th October 2017

Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary is a riverine wetland 50 km northwest of Hyderabad in Medak district. It is a place with a good number of resident and migratory birds, in addition to being home for the Marsh Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris.* It is recognized internationally as an Important Bird Area (IBA), due to its rich bird diversity and its high preference by migratory birds.

© Subrata Kool'17

Jacobin cuckoo, *Clamator jacobinus*

We were 6 participants for the birdwalk. The weather was cloudy with occasional sunshine. When we reached the Habitat Orientation Centre, we were four people. Two with binocs and two with cameras. Thus, we split into two groups, one explored the wooded patch and the other went near the bund of the reservoir. No activity was seen in the wooded patch so the other group came to the scrubland near the bund taking a different route. This area had excellent activity. A group of Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* played around the fence. Immature ones had started to develop few "Scales" on their chest. On the powerlines, Pied Cuckoos *Clamator jacobinus* perched occasionally going down in the bushes as if to pick some insect. Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* and Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* also perched on the cables to pick insects mid-air with acrobatic finesse. Few Red-rumped Swallows Cecropis daurica were in a group, preening themselves. Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* were seen carrying nesting material and taking it to a bush.

While returning a pair of Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* were seen in the power station. We were also delighted to see Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica,* Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi,* Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo,* and Jungle Babblers *Turdoides striata* busy foraging in the trees near the Habitat Orientation Centre. As we sat on the bridge after a long walk, we saw a peculiar warbler going pasted us. We spotted and photographed it. It was a Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris.* Soon, another individual was seen and a good photograph of it was captured. This warbler was seen near Hyderabad after many years.

A total of 94 species were reported at the end of the birdwalk.

© Subrata Kool'17

Yellow eyed babbler, *Chrysomma sinense*

Ameenpur Lake Trip Report

By RK Balaji

174th Bird Walk at Ameenpur lake
Sunday, 22nd October 2017

One the western fringes of Hyderabad, surrounded by fantastic primordial rock formation, modern apartments, factories and a village, is a sprawling and ancient man-made lake. Ameenpur lake dates back to the time of Ibrahim Qutb shah, who ruled the kingdom of Golconda between 1550 and 1580 AD. Ameenpur lake has the distinction of being the first water body in the country to be declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site. The biodiversity tag was awarded for the Pedda Ameenpur lake, which is at a higher elevation than Chinna Cheruvu.

It was a usual day for us. On reaching lake, first we headed to idli-dosa shop refreshment and mingle with other participants. After some time, we started for the day. Our Journey began with about 5 people.

Finally all eight of the trip participants arrived in Ameenpur Jacana pond (chinna cheruvu) at least before the start of the walk so all of us decided to gear up our equipment. Then we started our birding with all the members from here to Pedda Cheruvu and Kingfisher lake. Some spotted Prinias, Munias and Sunbirds beside lake and we captured Warblers to check identification (confirmed as Booted Warbler). After we reached of Pedda Cheruvu, sightings were slightly increased so we began to capture birds.

Later we tried to explore back side of Pedda Cheruvu where we found Wagtails, Robins, Ducks, Grebes, Rufous treepie and babblers. As the suggestions from one of member we moved towards kingfisher pond though level of water was higher than usual from long back. Water overflowing from KF lake to sprawl area. Observed activities of white-browed wagtail, indian bushlark and pipits.

We tried to cross water stream but as there was no way to head step across flow even though two of us crossed with effort to check activities other side. There I found sykes's and greenish warbler. Heard the call.

Post exploration around lake area, all decided to get back for the day and we found blue-capped rock thrush on the top of cliff.

Jacobin cuckoo, *Clamator jacobinus*

Uma Maheshwaram Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar

175th Bird Walk at Uma Maheshwaram
Sunday, 29th October 2017

Uma Maheshwaram is a temple dedicated to lord Shiva in the fringes of Amarabad Tiger Reserve in Telangana. It is about 150 km from Hyderabad on Hyderabad -Srisailam highway. It is on a hill surrounded by thick forests having good diversity of flora and fauna. It is a place that has been mentioned in ancient Hindu texts.

Hyderabad Birding Pals organized its 175th birdwalk here. It is a time of the year when winter migrants arrive, the forests teem with calls of warblers and the sky filled with migratory raptors. Fifteen members participated in the bird walk. Weather was pleasant with lot of sunshine.

View of the temple and the valley

Most of us had left from Hyderabad to do nocturnal birding here, few joined us early morning. Good part about bird watching here is all the birds come close to the temple and thus there is not much need to enter the forest. Plus the advantage of getting eye-level sightings as the temple is on a height, overlooking the valley with dense jungle. This place is famed for the presence of Yellow throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus*, a uncommonly seen endemic of South India. It is one of the few locations where this bird is easy to see.

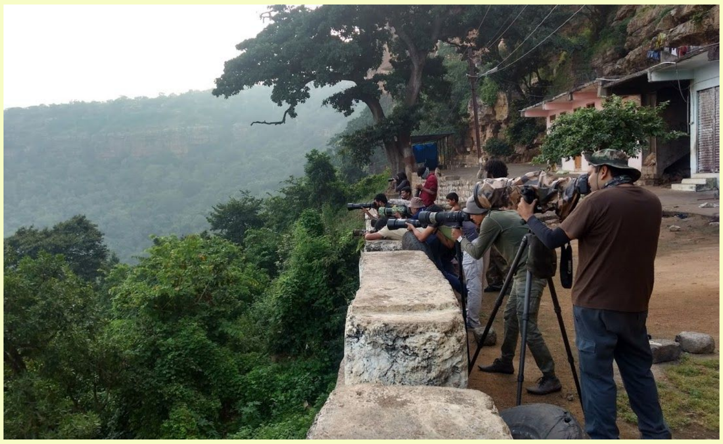
We took a nap for two hours after the nocturnal session, at 6 AM the forest started to light up. We reorganized ourselves, looking at the valley for any sound and movement. Warblers were in good numbers. Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and Green Warblers *Phylloscopus nitidus* started to be seen, chasing each other and going from tree to tree, giving a tough time to photograph them. We walked the length of the temple premises, going to the furthest end. There, two Blue-throated Flycatchers *Cyornis rubeculoides* were in a bush, making occasional sallies from a perch. Soon, a pair of Yellow throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* came in a tree close to us. Their numbers are reducing and in future we may not see them. So easily they came near us, do they know that we, humans are affecting their future and surely, making friends of us is not a good idea. They soon disappeared.

Verditer Flycatcher
Eumyias thalasinus

Meanwhile, a quiet showy Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus* was perched on top of a tree at our eye level. It made some acrobatic moves in air and again alighted at the same perch. The light reflected best of its colors and no wonder everyone jumped on the photo opportunity. It stayed for few minutes. A bird of prey was flying towards the parking lot, some of

Uma Maheshwaram Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar



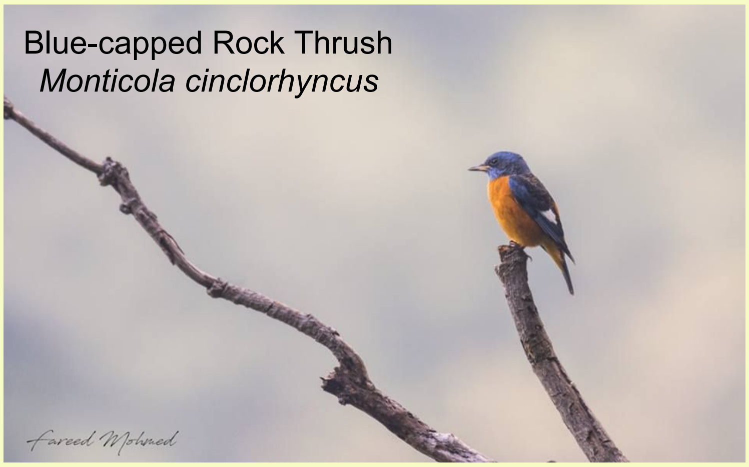
Participants clicking Verditer Flycatcher

the participants there took images and identified it as a Shaheen Falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinator.* Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons* were in good numbers, quite agile and always in a thicket. As if to compete in giving excellent views to Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*, a male Blue-capped Rock-Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus* called from a open branch. It was there for a long time.

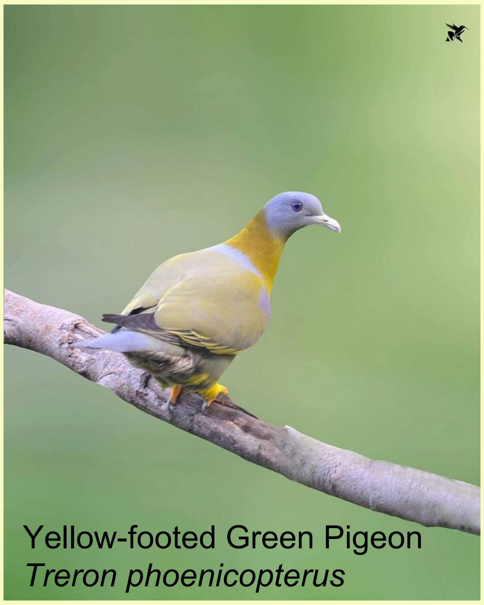
From the jungle below some of us could identify call of many birds like, Indian Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfie*ldii, Brown-headed Barbet *Psilopogon zeyla*nicus and Puff-throated Babbler Pellorneum ruficeps. Drongos many and gave lot of calls, White-bellied Drongo Dicrurus caerulescens, Ashy Drongo Dicrurus leucophaeus and Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus.* Then there were these innocent looking Yellow-footed Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus*, we saw one then another came flying and soon the whole banyan tree was filled with some forty Green Pigeons, diligently feeding on fruits. High up, a Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* flew and a Shikra *Accipiter badius* was heard calling from far.

A pair of Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* were on a light pole near temple. Enlightening some on the difference in the male and female plumages. A good number of Little Swifts *Apus affinis* flew over us in a jumble group.

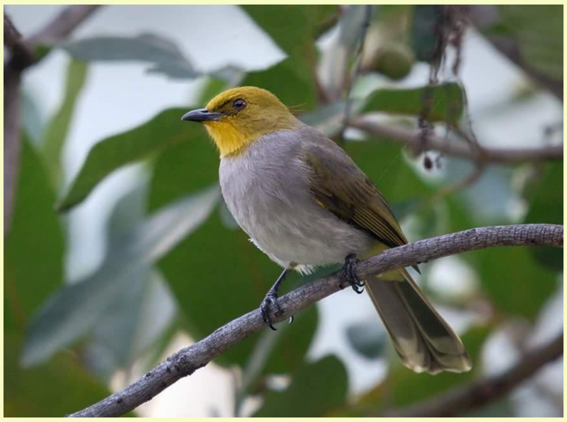
For three and a half hour's birding we clocked a species count of 48.



Blue-capped Rock Thrush
Monticola cinclorhyncus



Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
Treron phoenicopterus



Yellow-throated bulbul
Pycnonotus xantholaemus

And At Last The Great Indian Bustard

By Gopalakrishna Iyer

On a very cloudy morning, we, a few members of the Hyderabad birding pals, drove all the way again to Rollapadu in search of one of the least sighted, most elusive, critically endangered, Great Indian Bustard. We had already devoted several trips to this location only in search of this bird ,but luck turned its back towards us. Nevertheless, we persisted or the last of the bustards kept on calling us again and again.

A snap from Rollapadu Forest Office

The **Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)** aka ***Batta-meka-Pitta*** (locally called)**,** which once contested for the National bird of India has now earned itself a permanent position in the critically endangered category of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) Red list which makes it even more difficult to see one individual. The dwindling population of the once popular game bird has been attributed to the mainly excessive destruction of its habitat, hunting by the tribal population for food, the elite group for fun and the dogs/crows eating away the chicks/ eggs of this species. This has naturally selected the most elusive ones to survive and even more difficult to spot.

History

The Great Indian Bustard aka *kharchal* had already inked its own fate when it was once tasted by the Mughal Emperor Babar (1500s). In his compilation (Babur-nama), one of the important things he remembers about the bustard is that the whole of the bird tastes awesome and not just a few parts like other birds.

John Edward Gray (in the 1800s), a British zoologist, in his description of the bustard, says this bird was common, fairly common till Mysore but not to be found in Western Ghats and the North-East region. He further mentions the bird to be very commonly seen during the rainy season than the other times, which is actually their breeding season. Carrying on the trend from the Mughals, the British feasted upon this bird on every possible occasion as a delicacy.

Colonel Sykes (1832) describes this bustard as a noble bird which is seen in between the Bengal and the Malabar region (excluding both). He further describes that the female is one-third smaller than the male and the pectoral band being incomplete.

Morning sun basking by a female Great Indian Bustard, Rollapadu

He also noted that the males can be stalked closer, as close as 40-50 meters which can yields a fair shot.

And At Last The Great Indian Bustard

He also mentions one sportsman in the Bombay side claims to have shot over a thousand bustards chiefly from the Deccan and Southern Mahratta country.

Breeding display by the female Great Indian Bustard, Rollapadu

Brown (1887) describes the way he was able to approach as close as 30 yards to a bustard which exhibited a “mixture wariness and stupidity” (a male in breeding season) and shot after shot and stalking over two hours he was unsuccessful in shooting the bird down.

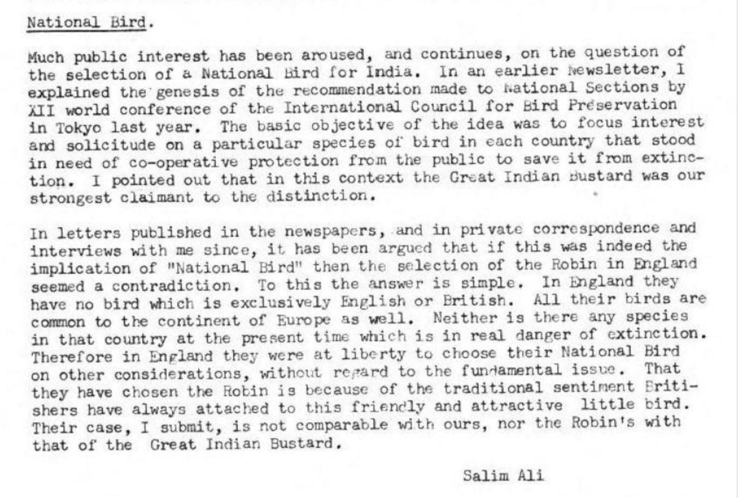
Jerdon and Hume (1890) describes the bird similarly and also the gives description of the egg shape, size and detailed featherly information. They also describe the measurements of the bird.

Salim Ali (1963) pledged the importance of the Great Indian Bustard being the national bird and not compare the British style as they do not have any endemic bird species. His request fell on deaf ears who feared mispronunciation of the name while surprisingly the “peacock aka peafowl’ gained to be the epitome of perfection in nomenclature and the status raised to the National Bird of India.

Behaviour

The Great Indian Bustard is an omnivorous bird which preys on insects and beetles. Alternately they consume on grass seeds, berries and exposed groundnuts. Their feeding is mainly during the morning and evening hours partly hidden in the grassland except during the breeding season. During the breeding season they come out to the open and display, calls to the females which can be heard for over half a kilometer. This also attracts unwanted attention of the hunters who maximize the hunting during this time.

The female bustard lays only a single egg which is on the ground and vulnerable to attack by crows and canines. It is also reported that distraction display is also performed by this bird when a threat is too close to the nest. The eggs take about 25 days to hatch and the fledglings stay for a couple of months with the mother. Locally unknown migratory pattern is seen in these birds. Well, now there are too few birds to perform a definite study.



National Bird.

Much public interest has been aroused, and continues, on the question of the selection of a National Bird for India. In an earlier Newsletter, I explained the genesis of the recommendation made to National Sections by XII world conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation in Tokyo last year. The basic objective of the idea was to focus interest and solicitude on a particular species of bird in each country that stood in need of co-operative protection from the public to save it from extinction. I pointed out that in this context the Great Indian Bustard was our strongest claimant to the distinction.

In letters published in the newspapers, and in private correspondence and interviews with me since, it has been argued that if this was indeed the implication of "National Bird" then the selection of the Robin in England seemed a contradiction. To this the answer is simple. In England they have no bird which is exclusively English or British. All their birds are common to the continent of Europe as well. Neither is there any species in that country at the present time which is in real danger of extinction. Therefore in England they were at liberty to choose their National Bird on other considerations, without regard to the fundamental issue. That they have chosen the Robin is because of the traditional sentiment Britishers have always attached to this friendly and attractive little bird. Their case, I submit, is not comparable with ours, nor the Robin's with that of the Great Indian Bustard.

Salim Ali

One of Salim Ali’s letters to the Prime Minister to make The Great Indian Bustard the National Bird

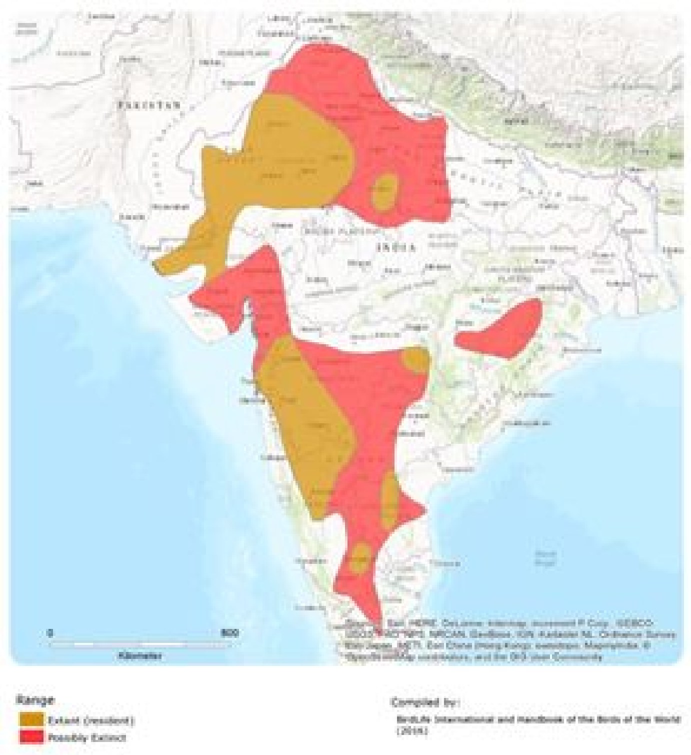
And At Last The Great Indian Bustard

Survival of the fittest

The question always arises, are there any more bustards left in the Rollapadu bustard sanctuary. The answer is a definite yes BUT.. but with the passing by years the numbers are dwindling, to fit in your finger counts. With the rules of the Darwinian evolutionary theory on natural selection it looks like the bustards have almost given up the survival challenge and are walking or in fact may be flying their way to extinction, not only in Rollapadu but all over India.

In 1982 there were about 60-100 bustards in Rollapadu area. Professional trappers during those times bagged about a dozen of bustards each year. Within just five years at Rollapadu during the late 80s, Ali and Rahmani reported about just 35 birds in the region. The little remaining population also suggests a genetic bottleneck and further inbreeding of the species. The local people of Kurnool district also mention about the establishment of the watch tower as well as the fencing of the sanctuary which could have as well displeased the resident bustards.The guards also speculate the construction could have interfered with their habitat and the reduction of numbers coincide with that time. Today, all that stands tall at Rollapadu is one or may be two bustard widows. Thanks to hunting, habitat destruction, development, biomagnification of pesticides and the advent of mechanized agriculture, it just had to happen.

In India, from about 1500 individuals in 1970s hunting had brought down the number to less than 300 in 2008. Currently the numbers are placed anywhere between 50-249 which by itself explains the status and to quote IUCN Red list Data, “It now requires an urgent acceleration and targeted conservation actions in order to prevent it from becoming functionally extinct within a few decades.”



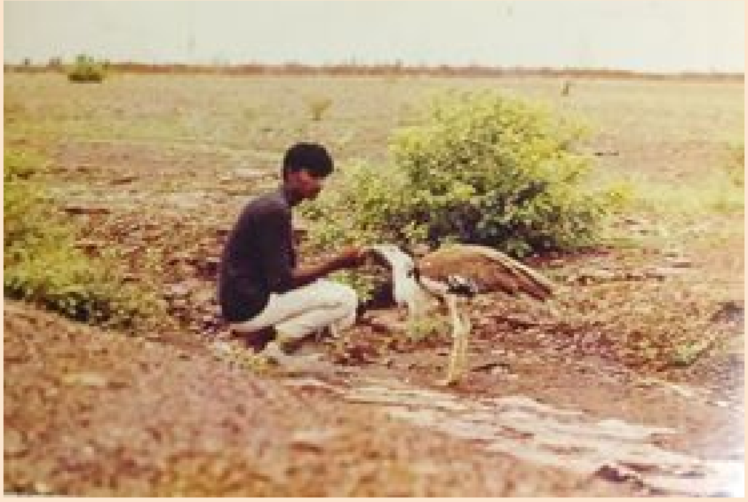
Distribution of Great Indian Bustard

Bustard in the shade during the noon hours

And At Last The Great Indian Bustard

The Guardians of Rollapadu

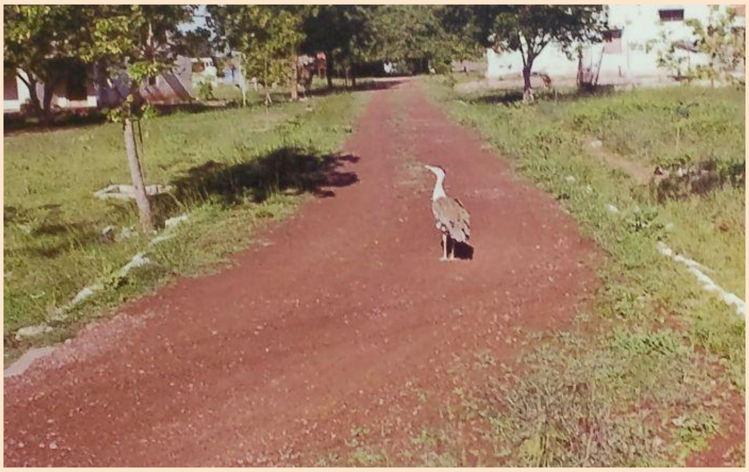
The bustard does not stand alone at Rollapadu. From the period of not so successful captive breeding in the late 70s, those who have come in close contact with the bird have a great respect and understand how majestic this bird is. To describe some of the grassland warriors we have come across a few active guards namely Adisheshalu, Gafoor and Allah bhakshi from whom we have heard stories of bustard rescue, feeding and protecting its breeding territory etc. They also described how they carefully hatched a couple of eggs took care of the bird to the releasing stage, but sadly it didn't make it to the main population but to appease a day's hunger of a few canines and a human family. We also had a brief discussion with DFO Selvam Chandran IFS and Yeshodabhai, IFS who most enthusiastically accompanied us to have a glimpse of the Great Indian Bustard. Rollapadu, though a small sanctuary, harbours a large buffer area where the bustard ranges, has just the right height of the grass required for the bustard as well as the cultivation in the surrounding which provides food for the bird.



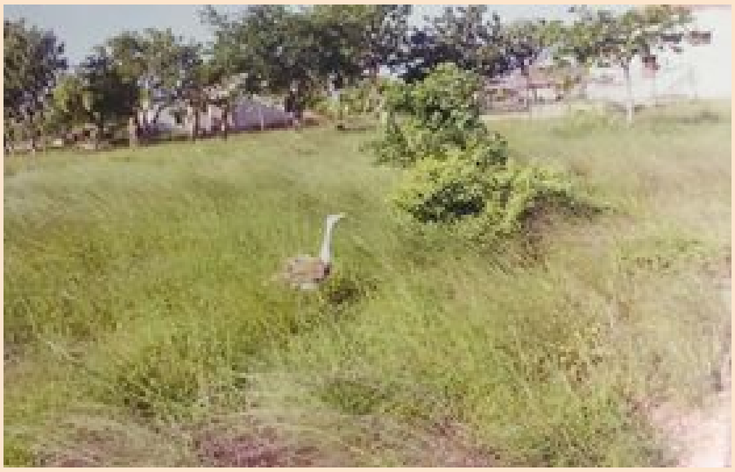
Feeding of Great Indian Bustard during captive breeding programme at Rollapadu

HBP's spotting of the Great Indian Bustard

On an extremely lucky day during the early morning hours a few members Naresh, Harish and Phani had the stroke of their luck when they spotted a Great Indian Bustard female from over a kilometer away. The closest approach was over 800 meters, still very far to photograph the bird, but satisfaction and happiness to see the Bustard in this region was definitely beyond words in the dictionary. The bustard was walking for over an hour following which the sun made her to go into the bushes.



The Great Indian Bustard visits the Forest Guest House breeding programme at Rollapadu



The Great Indian Bustard at the sanctuary premises of Rollapadu

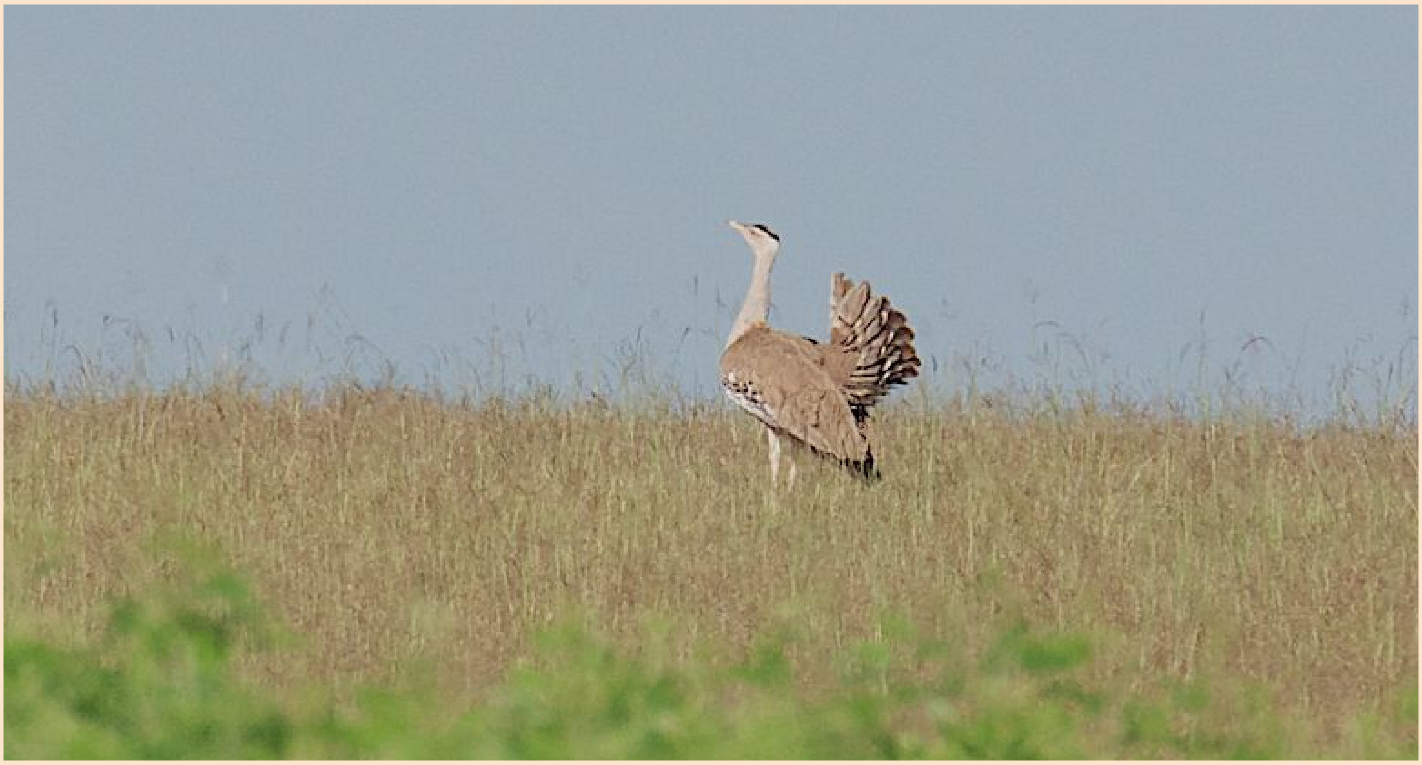
And At Last The Great Indian Bustard

The Great Indian Bustard just before hiding

We made several visits to the place hoping to see the bustard, but with very little luck. On another extremely lucky day as we consider it, we – Harikrishna, Sriram, Ashis and myself encountered another rare opportunity to spot the bustard over a kilometer away. Even more luckier we felt when the sun came the female displayed for about half an hour following which she started feeding and then slowly moved to the shade away from our sight. Once again, we had a glimpse of her while driving by a bit closer but we chose to move on not to disturb her feeding.

Bustardscape - Rollapadu

Discussing our sightings, we felt so happy to see one of the rarest birds in the region. We also felt sad about the bleak future for the survival of this species. Among over 25 visits we made, just 2 visits gave us the opportunity which was a very distant view. The bustard protection programmes so far have least influenced the population of these species. Who knows, we might just have seen the last one of its kind in our lifetime…



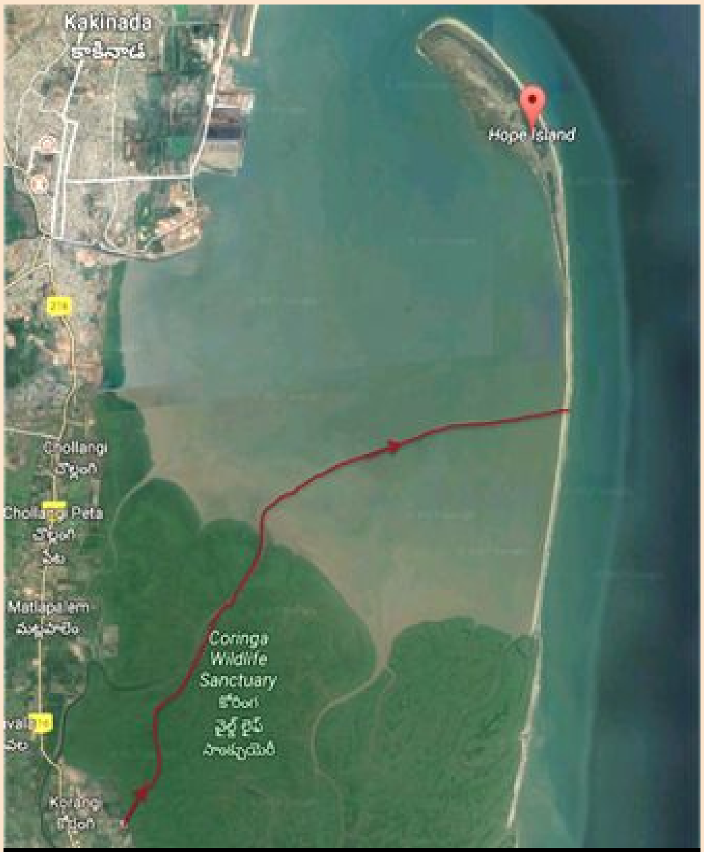
The Great Indian Bustard at morning breeding display at Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary, 2017

A Birder's Diwali in Hope Island

By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Diwali celebration was taking its shape and colour in and around Hyderabad, we decided to celebrate this Diwali by adding some lifers to our basket, if possible. We planned to visit Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, a mangrove habitat situated in the lap of Kakinada, a very beautiful village in Andhra Pradesh. On 20th October,2017 we started driving from Ravulapalem bus stand, a place around 65 Kms from Coringa . The smiling countryside, soothing breeze blended with the aroma of the paddy fields surrounding us were making our drive enchanting. And some early morning drizzling made it even better but put our basket under question.

As soon as we reached the village Ramannapalem, the place from where we hired a boat of a local fisher man (Name- Mr Satyanarayana, Contact Number- 9666677972) to enter into Coringa WLS, the weather started supporting us. The helmsman arranged some nice place for us to sit with our heavy gears on the boat. We started our journey in search of finding Black capped kingfisher as we were in the perfect habitat and some recent sightings to have reported 5-10 black capped kingfishers from this place. Well having this in mind, all the white throated kingfishers started looking like virtual black-capped kingfishers and we never stopped clicking even one with a rate of 5-10 frames per second. With the drumming of our boat and clucking of our cameras, we continued our journey and found some Whimbrels, many Eurasian collared doves, cormorants etc. And finally our hope to see a black capped kingfisher became like a bubble when we could see the blue see in front of us and overwhelmed. Then without thinking much we requested Satyanarayana to head towards Hope Island just to explore.



The route we followed during the journey to Hope Island through Coringa WLS from the village is shown in red

Hope Island (16.97°N 82.34°E) is a thin strip of land, very famously known for its tadpole like shape, is just 7 metres high from the sea level situated in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh . The formation of this Island is very recent may be around two hundred years and this thin bar of land was formed because of the deposition of sand and silt at the meeting point of Godavari river and Bay of Bengal. Hope Island is 16Kms east from Kakinada, 483 kms from capital city Hyderabad, nearest major railway station is Rajahmundry, and bus station is Kakinada APSRTC bus stand.

A Birder's Diwali in Hope Island

Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

While moving through the sea, we saw some terns and most of them were Caspian terns, the largest tern found in India even larger than some gulls like brown headed gulls. With the temperature and humidity rising up, finally our boat hit the beach of Hope Island with lots of hope. The breadth of the island will be not more than 60-70 metres and it is inhabited by a kind of creeper growing on the silt mixed sand mounds.

Our curiosity and enthusiasm multiplied several folds as soon as we reached and without landing from the boat itself we started filling our basket with surprises as we spotted few ruddy turnstones and curlew sandpipers.

Ruddy Turnstones, *Arenaria interpres*

Curlew Sandpipers, *Calidris ferruginea*

After we went onto the island then everything was spellbound, every nook and corner of this thin strip of Island was filled with the musical calls and it was all tranquility. I stood still and gulped some air before I could start spotting some birds. The whole scenario was so active and the sun was shining from the front making it all golden. I felt like I was watching a live 3D video in a big screen where the birds were going with the receding water and again coming back with the advancing water along with their beautiful calls. This whole game was so alluring, as it has to be that I forgot that I have to take care of my basket. We moved forward and spotted the most active member of the day with upwardly curved beaks, the Terek sandpipers. They were so active in collecting food that I had to increase my shutter speed to freeze their actions. There were so many sand plovers both lesser and greater, Kentish plovers, flocks of Pacific golden plovers and very few and hard to identify Grey plovers or black bellied plovers within the flocks of golden plovers. As we moved further we saw sanderlings, marsh sandpipers, so many Western reef egrets. Their numbers were increasing with time.

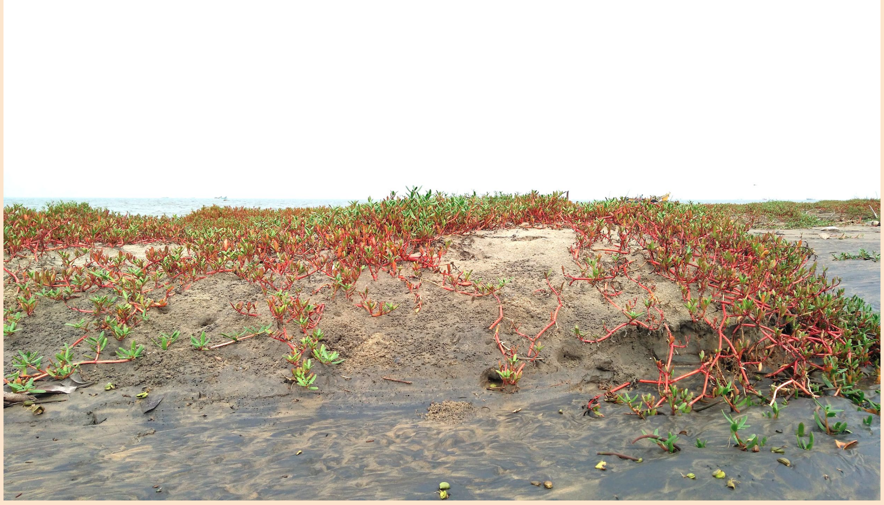
A Birder's Diwali in Hope Island

When I was reviewing some clicks, I found two terns with yellow tipped black bills, those were Sandwich terns in a mixed flock of other terns and gulls. Before that we already got hundreds of Caspian terns, a good number of Gull-billed terns, some common terns, both crested terns: greater and lesser along with the usual whiskered terns. The sightings of terns not only in good numbers but also in types made our day as a "*tern*"ing day. This small island was also a good habitat for Eurasian Curlews, the birds with huge downwardly curved beaks. To our surprise, so many red ghosts also inhabited the island, yes I am talking about the Red Ghost crabs- ghosts with colours and a shape.

These crabs, many insects provide the birds a good foraging ground, the creepers growing on the sand as a safe shelter and above all less human interference make the island a good choice for the birds to inhabit. We recorded only 30 species, but ultimately the thing that made our day gleaming was the number of each species we found rather than the type of species just to fill the basket.

Sandwich Tern
Thalasseus sandvicensis

Pallas's Gull
Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus



Silt mixed sand mound in Hope Island, providing a shelter for all life forms.

Red Ghost Crab
Ocypode macrocera

Two nights with the rarest Owls of Telangana

By Fareed Mohmed

It was almost year back when we were gathering information on all owl species recorded in Telangana. There are currently 12 species of Owls found in Telangana and we wanted to click them all. Some were easy, some tough, and some seemed impossible. There were two species which looked were tough - Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (SBEO) *Bubo nipalensis* and Brown Hawk Owl (BHO) *Ninox scutulata*. In the last year we read multiple articles, books and looked into reports of SBEO to get a better understanding of its habitat, activity etc., anything that helps us in finding them. We had multiple discussions with bird guides in Kerala to help us understand this elusive bird. In the last few months while we were searching for Scops Owls around Mallela Theertham in Amarabad Tiger Reserve, we looked for this bird during nocturnal sessions in previously reported location and other possible locations. They were all fruitless and we were losing hope of getting them.

On 14th October we (Fareed, Sunny, Manoj, and Arjun) were going to Mallela Theertham for photographing the two Scops Owl species. These were the two owls whose calls we were able to record earlier but never got to photograph them in Telangana. The plan was to stay at Mannanur check post overnight and leave early morning for Mallela Theertham (our regular practice). Due to heavy rains on that day in Hyderabad we started off very late and mid-way into the journey we learnt the room we blocked is not available due to double booking. We had two options at that time, either go back home or spend the night doing nocturnal birding at previously identified locations in Amarabad Tiger Reserve. We are glad we took the second option.

After entering the forest range (much before Mannanur check post) we stopped for a break. We heard a Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus atripennis* and decided to start our nocturnal session from there. Nothing much was happening for about 15 to 20 minutes and then we saw a big bird flying very slow, very silent about 10 meters from us. It perched on a nearby tree. Manoj was holding the torch, Sunny had his camera ready with needed nocturnal settings. We approached the bird slowly and put the light on it, Sunny's camera was firing like a machine gun. The bird was facing away from us and had its wings open which covered its overall appearance. The bird left after few seconds. We quickly reviewed the clicks, none of them showed the face. Only wing was visible. But there was something unique in the photo. We could see something that looked like a very big ear tuft. We were frozen for a second thinking it could be a SBEO.

> In the next few minutes we heard The Sound...The SCREAM

A part of us was saying this is a Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* and another SBEO. We sent the photo to Mohit (who didn't join us that day due to bad health) for ID. There was not much visible on the photo so Mohit replied back saying unable to ID with this and it could be Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*. Depressed we sat discussing how amazing it would have been if it was a SBEO. In the next few minutes we heard The Sound ...The SCREAM, in a split second we recognized the call, our cell phones were out and recording all the audio around us, and before we could record the scream it was silent again.

Two nights with the rarest Owls of Telangana

Now we were hearing deep hoots, this was something unheard by us. A completely new call, our phones still recording everything. We went in the direction of the hoot, it was getting stronger and stronger and we were able to locate the tree where this bird was sitting but unable to find the bird on it.

It was a very dense tree in the middle of night, pitch darkness all around us. We were scared, heartbeats rising, fear engulfed us. There could have been a wild animal around us but our urge to find the source of this call was very strong and we kept looking. And just like that it became silent again; Manoj saw the bird flying towards the same point where we first saw the Owl. Upon reaching the place we saw a White coloured bird huge in size facing towards us. This was the moment we were waiting for Sunny pointed the camera towards the bird and signalled Manoj to fire the Torch. we could hear the camera fire like a machine gun again and in between Sunny shouted "Bhai Bhai this is Spot Bellied Indeed" he signalled Manoj to turn off torch since he got enough record shots. And quickly showed us the images. What we saw made me freeze, water filled my eyes, heart pounding like a Machine, I couldn't talk. Sunny asked us to pull out our cameras from car. Meanwhile Arjun was taking a nap in car. We woke him up and gave him the torch. All 3 of us aimed our cameras towards the bird and signalled Arjun. As soon as Arjun fired the torch we were all firing our cameras in Joy. After about a minute the bird left. We kept our cameras down and were jumping in joy. we wanted to share our happiness with friends so instantly shared photo over what’s app group.

After this we heard Oriental Scops Owls *Otus sunia* calling from a distance but none of us were in mood of anything else. We continued looking for the bird until 3:30 am after that we were extremely sleepy and slept in car. at about 5:30 am when there was a very little light coming out we saw a bird flying towards us resembling Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* we were able to take some clicks (all blurry) when looked at images it was clear it was a SBEO. After sometime there was light and we moved to Uma Maheswaram and continued birding. We only got record shots that night, next few days we were discussing how lucky was that Night and there might never be such a night ever again in our birding future. We didn't knew what nature had in store for us coming weekend.

By Thursday the plan was set to go back again for the Weekend, We were happy that Abhishek was coming with us this time, Manoj couldn't make it because he was going Rollapadu, Mohit, Sunny were coming and one of my non-birder friend (Rajesh) decided to join for this Nocturnal session with us.

On Oct 28 we reached Uma Maheswaram by evening did a little diurnal birding and were getting ready for another night of Nocturnal. It was around 9 pm we heard Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* calling. We all walked in the direction of call and reached a point beyond where was shoulder high vegetation (recent rains help the vegetation grow real wild). It was dark, forest zone and a bit scary looking from there. The bird kept calling in the silence of night. In no time it became clear which tree is the call coming from. It was about 50-75 meters away with dense vegetation in between.

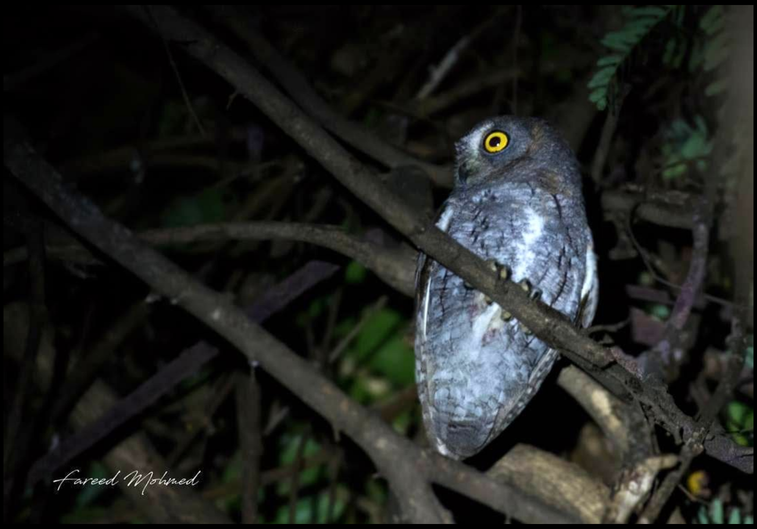
Two nights with the rarest Owls of Telangana

We were all looking at each other asking what to do. Abhishek had the greatest enthusiasm to go find it, almost no fear on his face. It was his confidence that gave us courage to go find the bird (Abhishek has combed these areas before many times and he knew it very well, Do not try anything like this when you have doubts about the place). We all started towards the tree dozing away all the vines and plants ahead of us and made it under the tree. It was very dark under the tree. The bird was still calling and all of us started to locate it. Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* is the smallest Owl found in Telangana and it hides extremely well making it very tough to spot. We used our torch to look for it. I noticed from under the tree it was like a hut, you can't see the sky at all, a perfect habitat for a nocturnal bird to rest during the day. Sunny pulled the torch from Rajesh's hand and pointed at the bird. We all fired our cameras to get the shots. In less than a minute the bird moved its position and we could find it. It didn't fly away just jumped to another perch and it was missing. We were searching for it and suddenly out of nowhere we heard the "Scream" coming from behind us. It was the call of SBEO.

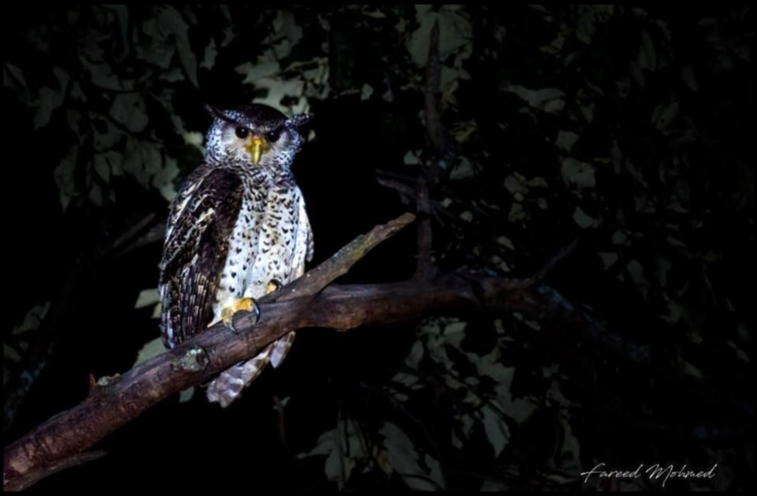
We quickly turned back and moved out looking for it. We saw the bird again on same perch, took few record shots and the bird left. We got busy looking for other nocturnal species. Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus atripennis* was calling continuously from inaccessible places and we were trying to get him.

At about 12 in the night one SBEO came flying towards us. it was flying at our eye level very slow, almost like a slow motion movie scene and sat on a perch roughly 20 meters away from us. It was surprising, something we were dreaming about.

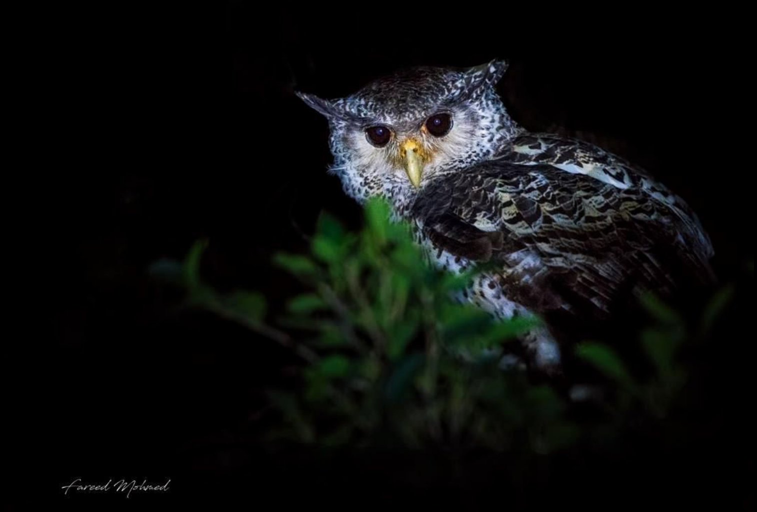
...Cont.



Oriental Scops Owl *(Otus sunia)*,
Amarabad Tiger Reserve, By Fareed Mohmed



Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*), Amarabad Tiger Reserve, By Fareed Mohmed Individual: 1



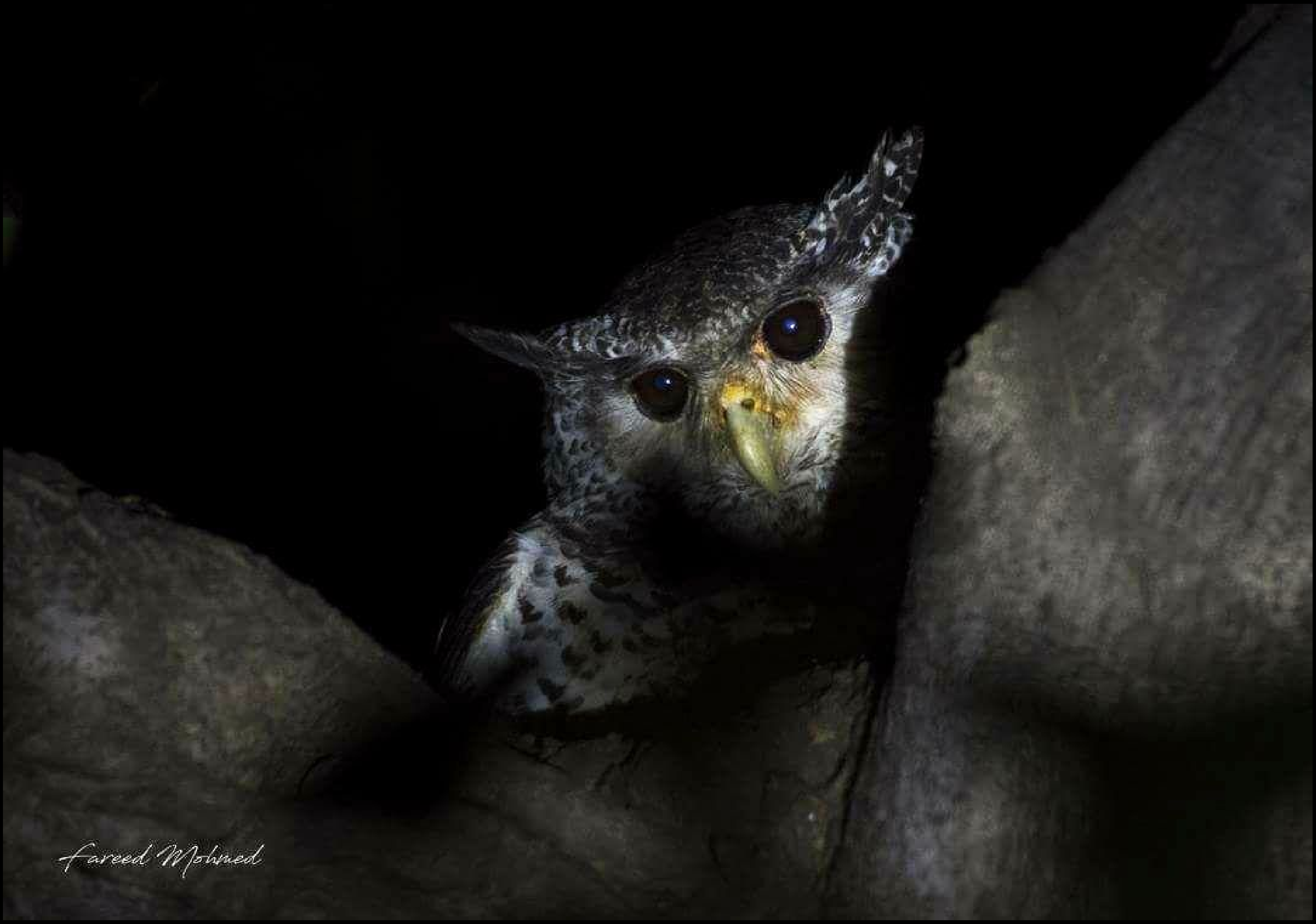
Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*), Amarabad Tiger Reserve, By Fareed Mohmed Individual: 2 (Male)

Spot Bellied Eagle Owl *Bubo nipalensis*

There are roughly 38 species of Owls found on the Indian Subcontinent, a majority of them have been linked with the negative world due to superstitions and local beliefs. Amongst them only one has earned the nickname of "Devils Bird" due to a call it makes which resembles a human scream. This bird is known as Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (SBEO) *Bubo Nipalensis*. SBEO is regarded as king of Nocturnal birds. This is the second biggest Owl (63 cm) in the Indian subcontinent, short by mere 3 cm to Eurasian Eagle Owl (Indian Rock Eagle Owl) *Bubo bubo* which measures around 50 cm. This is also sixth longest owl in the world and has ninth longest wings of any living owl. In its territory it is the largest nocturnal predator on wings.

It is mostly nocturnal, spends the day dozing in well-hidden spots like dense trees, rock cavities etc. Preys chiefly upon game birds. A powerful bird capable of overpowering large birds like Jungle Fowl, Peafowl and reported to kill Jackals, Hares and fawns of Barking Deer. Also takes Monitor Lizards, Snakes, and Fish. Reports also indicate feeding on carrion.

SBEO is an uncommon species. Lives in very low densities in large territories.

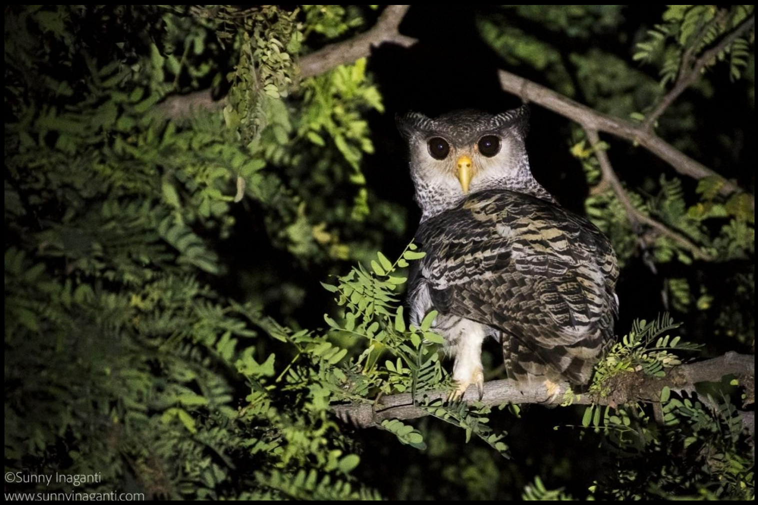


Two nights with the rarest Owls of Telangana

We moved a little and started clicking it. It was not like the one we have seen before. A bit small and bold, almost showing off. He gave us enough time to attach a mono-pod under my camera and take shots with 1100 ISO. He sat there for almost 5 minutes and moved to a perch behind us in much more open. It kept playing with us for the next 20 minutes in different angles. While this was in front of us there was another call from behind us and this one started looking in that direction. This suggested there were two of them. Both had different behaviour, first one a bit shy and sitting on high perches and this one a bit bold and sat on open low perches.

We were extremely happy and satisfied, just then it decided to give us another surprise. It sat on an eye level perch less than 4 meters away from us. We had to zoom out from 500 mm to 200 mm and still didn't fit the guy in frame, rotated the camera to portrait mode and started clicking him again. He was surrounded by 4 photographers and 1 person throwing light at him. He could have gone easily if he wanted but he didn't. Looks like he never saw humans this close and we for sure didn't see any owl this close ever before. After about 5 minutes he left. We didn't have any mood to follow it. We sat down and started looking at our shots. There was a huge smile on each ones face. So happy that we didn't even talk for next few minutes. The trip was over for us by 1 AM. We sat in car for some time to take a break.

At about 2 AM we decided to go till Dindi have tea and come back. We started driving and may be after few hundred meters immediately we saw a huge bird swooping over the road, wings full stretched under the light of street light. Quickly it flew up as if it picked something from ground and sat on nearby tree. We got off the car and looked at it through our cameras.



Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*), Amarabad Tiger Reserve, By Sunny Inaganti
Individual: 3 (Sub Adult)

It was another SBEO. Head smaller than previous two and eyes very big, overall size smaller than the previous two suggesting it to be a sub adult. It too gave us some good shots before taking off in the darkness.
At around 3 AM we heard a "Whuk"... It was Indian Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena* this time. We quickly got off car and started looking for it. We followed the direction of a second call. There was a small dry tree about 3 meters ahead of us and a small white bird was perched on it. As soon as we put light on it was confirmed to be an Indian Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*. One more bird in minimum focus distance of our lens, a full frame shot indeed. He gave us a complete 10 minutes of show jumping from one perch to another.

We couldn't believe how fast all this happened. From having zero shots of this bird to having dozens of full frames in less than 10 minutes is what something still baffles me. We waited it for it to return.

Two nights with the rarest Owls of Telangana

Indian Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*),
Amarabad Tiger Reserve, By Mohit Joshi

At around 5 AM we heard the sweetest Owl call (also my favourite bird call) musical oo-uk ...ooo-uk... It was Brown Hawk Owl (Brown Boobook) *Ninox scutulata*, our faces were lit up in happiness again thinking what more nature has for us today. And in minutes the first oo-uk ...ooo-uk.. Was joined by another oo-uk ...ooo-uk.. . There were two Brown Hawk Owls there that night. I quickly pulled out my cellphone and recorded the call as a proof for the checklist. We tried very hard to spot him but no luck at it. It was soon 5:45 am and everything around us was coming to life. Multiple birds came out and the sounds of Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata* were lost in the sounds of other birds. After some time there was enough light and we had to end our nocturnal session and proceed to Uma Maheswaram for diurnal birding.

- Fareed Mohmed

Indian Scops Owl *(Otus bakkamoena)*
Amarabad Tiger Reserve
By Sunny Inaganti

What's in my camera bag?

By Kumar Kanchu

what's in my bag...

My name is Kumar Kanchu (KK). I am a passionate photographer, from Hyderabad, India. I enjoy teaching photography as much as I do shooting. I want to give back to the photography community that has given me so many opportunities to learn. I teach photography classes and post processing sessions and host workshops.

I started my photography with fashion and model shoots and did a lot of study in studio lighting. As of right now I shoot lot of Wildlife, Architecture, Landscapes, Culture, Street and Portraiture, but I periodically will get into special genres like Macro, Product, Time-lapse and Astro. I enjoy any excuse to have a camera in my hand and I am in field. I have a hard time shooting just one type of subject, which is why I'm all over the place. Because of the variety of genres I shoot, I need to have gear that will be accommodating to my diverse interests. I try to keep a rather minimal amount of gear, but for now this is what's in my bag.

I have a **Canon 1DX Mark II**. This camera is a workhorse. I need a body that can keep up with the diverse amount of work I do especially action in wildlife, and the 1DX never lets me down. I too keep Canon 5D MII as my second body for many reasons, primarily as a backup in wildlife, but other genres for quick access for second lens.

Lenses I have:

The **Canon 600mm f/4** which I use for most my work wildlife work, now changing this due to his heaviness and my growing age, soon replacing with Canon 500mm f/4 IS II.

The **Canon 70-200mm f/2.8**. I use this for multipurpose like in wildlife I use this quite often in jeep safaris to capture mammals, portraits during travels and for candid shots during cultural events/gatherings.

The **Canon 24-70mm f/2.8** which I use for most my work other genres work. There is a reason this is one of Canon's most popular lenses. The weather sealing on these are amazing.

The **Canon 16-35mm f/2.8** which I use for most my work other genres work. There is a reason this is one of Canon's most popular lenses. The weather sealing on these are amazing.

The **Sigma 12-24mm f/4 Art**. This thing really is a piece of art. Having a zero distortion from 12-24mm is truly beautiful. This lens is awesome for landscapes and interior tight spaces.

What's in my camera bag?

The **Carl Zeiss 50mm f/1.4** which I use for most my work other genres work. There is a reason this is one of Canon's most popular lenses. The weather sealing on these are amazing.

The **Canon 100mm f/2.8** which I use for most my work other genres work. There is a reason this is one of Canon's most popular lenses. The weather sealing on these are amazing.

The **Sigma 15mm f/2.8** fisheye which I use for most my work other genres work. There is a reason this is one of Canon's most popular lenses. The weather sealing on these are amazing.

The **Sigma 150-600mm f/4.5-6.3** which is again I use it for wildlife, specially birding on walk or self-driving trips.

Tripod and heads:

Gitzo GT5542 : I use this for wildlife especially birding, this carbon fiber legs are very light and easily can walk with this on the field. Along with this I use Nest's carbon fiber gimbal.

Manfrotto Tripod: Use this for landscapes, waterfalls, astro and macro etc… Along with this I use a ball head from vanguard for easy adjustments.
Manfrotto Tripod fluidic video head with proaim legs for the video shooting for smooth recording.

Sirui Monopod for walk around photography as during cultural events where we need longer durations to hold the camera in hand.

Flashes:

For my strobed work I have two Canon 600EX-RT and two Yongnuo YN-600 EX-RT. I like these because they're very small and portable and with the four of them I have enough power for any work that I do.

Ring Flash from VilTrox for the macro photography, which is great aid when shooting super macro where we have to shoot l0wer f-stop like f22 in order to get higher DOF.

To trigger them I use a Canon ST-E3-RT. For modifiers I have a 5 in 1 43 inch reflector.

Accessories:

Canon Battery grip, I actually mainly use these to prevent the bottom of the camera from getting all scratched up, and of course for more battery life.

Various filters from Tiffen and LEE like gradient, ND and polarizers.

Fotodiox Macro Extension Tubes for super macro shots, Aputure Intervalometer for star trails and long exposures.

Camera Strap: sun-sniper professional, this is my favorite strap on the market. Think Tank card wallet for carrying the multiple formats of the cards like SD, CF and Micro SD.

Bags:

Tamrac Sling Bag for easy access to the lenses and second camera during photo walks and cultural events like Bonalu, Kumbhmela etc.

What’s in my camera bag?

Vangaurd Heralder is another sling type also top opening bag, will allow easy access of the second body with second lens. Also this accommodates a laptop during flight travels.

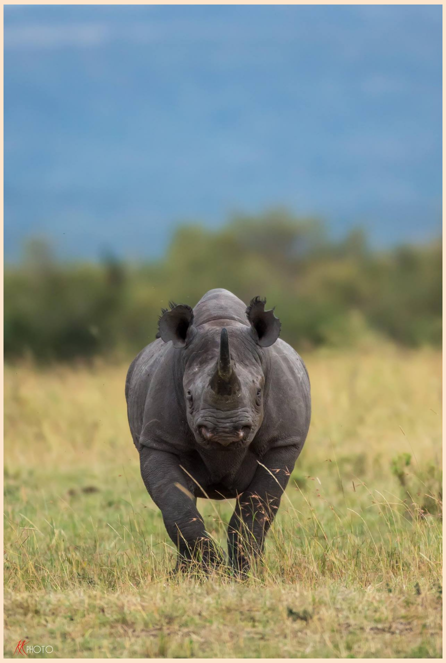
Lowepro ProRunner, I use this when traveling abroad as it accommodates more lenses and accessories along with laptop. Also it is with wheels so easy to carry in airports.

Canon Deluxe Photo Backpack, I use this during photo walks with one camera body and second body and lens is not often needed as lenses and second camera is not easily accessible from backpack.

Miscellaneous:
Torch, Headlamp, Velcro tape, Duracell batteries, Lens cloths along with cleaning liquid, Pocket Swiss knife, Crystal Ball, prototype of subjects (like cars bikes etc.) Allen wrench.

Do we need many lenses and accessories for photography? Is it not expensive and also bulky? Unfortunately, yes, each genre demands separate set of equipment that includes from camera body to lenses and accessories. But photography is not only about gear, it is about being at the right place and at the right time to seize a right moment.

You can reach me for any help in choosing gear, message me through Facebook, Kumar Kanchu or shoot me an email at kkphotohyd@gmail.com

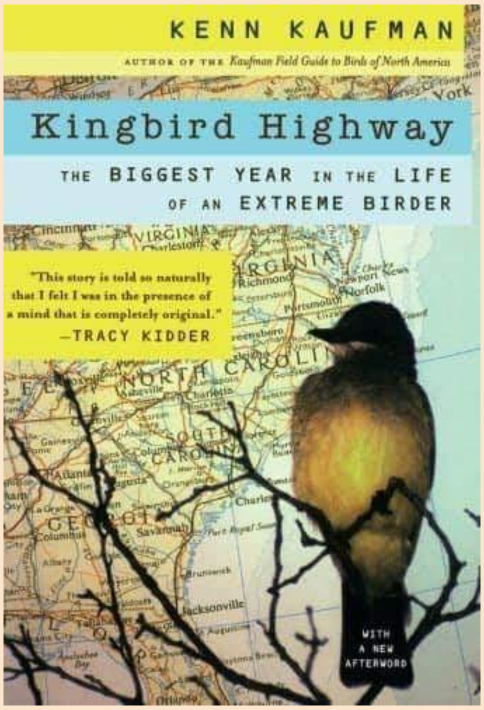


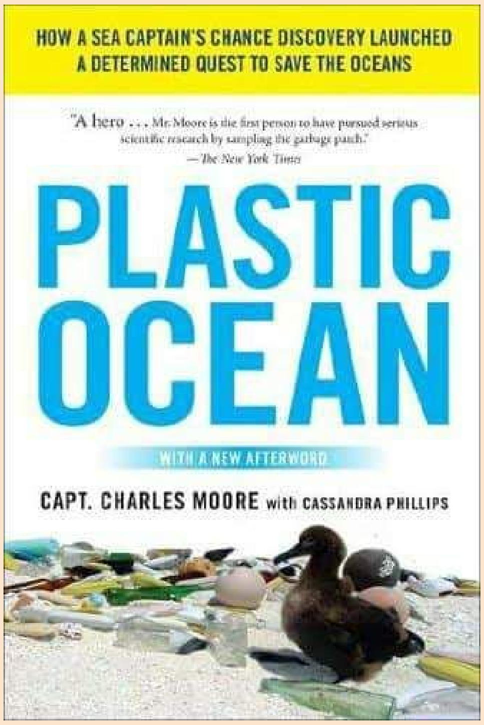
Lesser Kestrel Female
Tal Chappar, Oct 2017

Book Review

By Rohith Nareddy

It is that time of the year already to start making plans for the new year not that far ahead. And what can be the most wonderful thing in the life of a birder than to undertake a 'Big Year'. And for some inspiration one of the most fascinating accounts of a big year is by Kenn Kaufman one of the most respected ornithologist and author of best selling books of birds in the USA. In the year 1973 Kaufman aged 19 set out for his big year and finally made an impressive count of 666 species of birds spanning Alaska to Florida. With the blessings of supportive parents and with a shoestring budget, he gave up everything except for the most basic of comforts sometimes living up on cat food because it was cheap. Though some aspects of 'Kingbird Highway' are dated it is nevertheless an inspiring account of a man in pursuit of his passion and I am sure will motivate many more to do a big year.


KENN KAUFMAN
AUTHOR OF THE Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America
Kingbird Highway
THE BIGGEST YEAR IN THE LIFE OF AN EXTREME BIRDER
"This story is told so naturally that I felt I was in the presence of a mind that is completely original."
—TRACY KIDDER
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

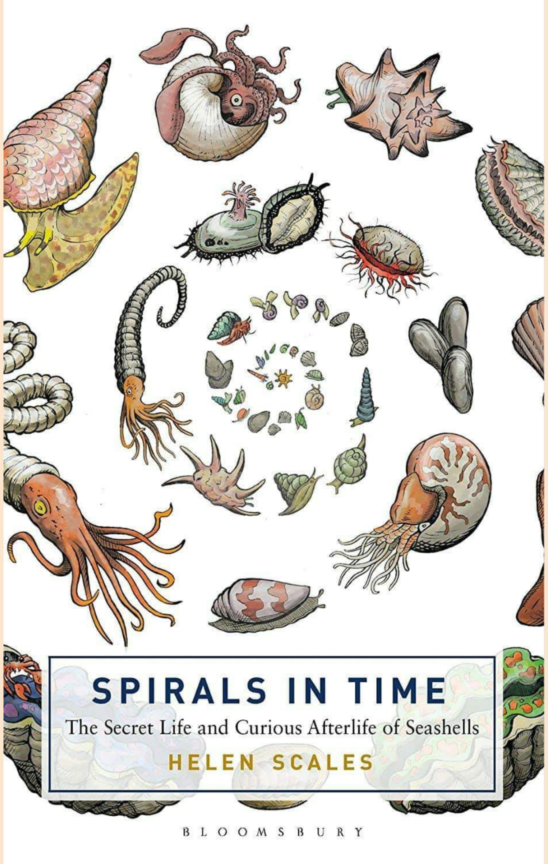

HOW A SEA CAPTAIN'S CHANCE DISCOVERY LAUNCHED A DETERMINED QUEST TO SAVE THE OCEANS
"A hero . . . Mr. Moore is the first person to have pursued serious scientific research by sampling the garbage patch."
—The New York Times
PLASTIC OCEAN
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD
CAPT. CHARLES MOORE with CASSANDRA PHILLIPS

Have you ever wondered what creatures made up the beautiful seashells you have come across on a walk along the coast. 'Spirals in Time: The Secret Life and Curious Afterlife of Seashells' is that book which will give us an understanding of the biological and historical functions these shells served.

In one story the author recounts how the Dutch ships would use them as ballast and on arrival home, the shells would be auctioned off and used in the Atlantic slave trade, because cowries were used as money in much of Africa for centuries, shells from the Seychelles. One other story tells us how hermit crabs line up near the site of an abandoned shell to replace the uncomfortable shell which they've outgrown.

Book Review

In the summer of 1997, Charles Moore set sail from Honolulu returning home after competing in a trans-Pacific race. To get to California, he and his crew took a shortcut through the seldom-traversed path in the ocean. There, Moore realized his catamaran was surrounded by a “plastic soup.” He had stumbled upon the largest garbage dump on the planet where plastic outweighed zooplankton, the ocean’s food base. In 'Plastic Ocean', Moore recounts his ominous findings and unveils the secret life and hidden properties of plastics. From milk jugs to polymer molecules small enough to penetrate human skin or be unknowingly inhaled, plastic is now suspected of contributing to a host of ailments, including infertility, autism, thyroid dysfunction, and some cancers. This book brings up the less discussed theme of where the garbage ends up comfortably away from the sight of people and may make people realise that there should be a responsibility on people, governments and corporations to get the priorities on maintaining the planet's health.



Sighting of Large-billed Leaf Warbler

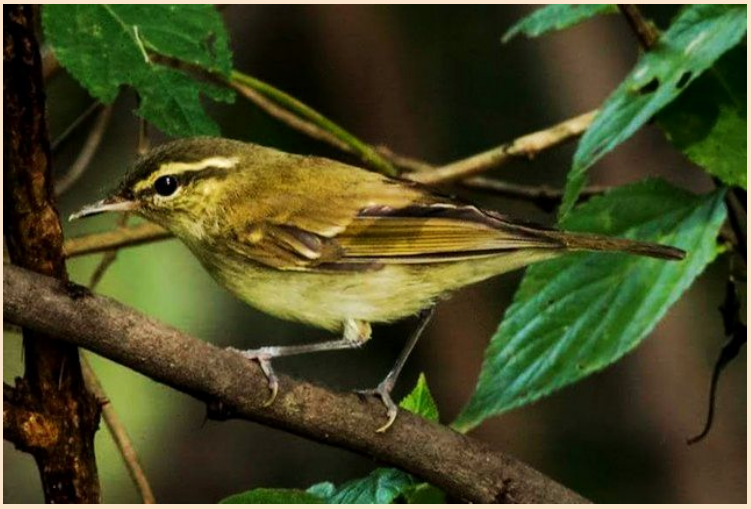
By Ajinkya Supekar

Manjeera Reservoir, Sangareddy, TS
Sunday, 15th October 2017

At 173rd birdwalk at Manjeera reservoir, Me and Phani Krishna Raavi were looking for birds in the wooded patch in front of habitat orientation center. This patch is known to have good activity of birds. We were seeing Chestnut-tailed Starling **(***Sturnia malabarica*), Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *(Terpsiphone paradisi*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), and Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*) busy foraging in the trees. We both had binoculars and Subrata Kool and Pavan Kumar soon joined us after photographing birds near the reservoir. This made the ratio of binocs to cameras equal. In the group of trees there were many birds, a mixed-species foraging flock with drongos, paradise flycatchers, robins, starlings and babblers. We were looking keenly to see newcomers to the flock.

Then all of a sudden two warblers came to the trees actively going up and down the branches. One individual looked darker and larger with prominent supercilium and large bill- indicating Large-billed Leaf Warbler **(***Phylloscopus magnirostris*). Pavan Kumar and Subrata Kool took good images of it for identification. It was an unusual warbler for us so we decided to take opinion of experts on online forum. It was confirmed to be Large-billed Leaf Warbler *P. magnirostris*, with its dark forehead, large bill, yellowish-white supercilium, broad dark eye-stripe and overall large appearance.

There are previous records of this species around Hyderabad. It is a passage migrant for this region. In winter it migrates from the Himalayas and central China to the western ghats and Sri Lanka. As in the case with most warblers, it can be easily distinguished with its call.

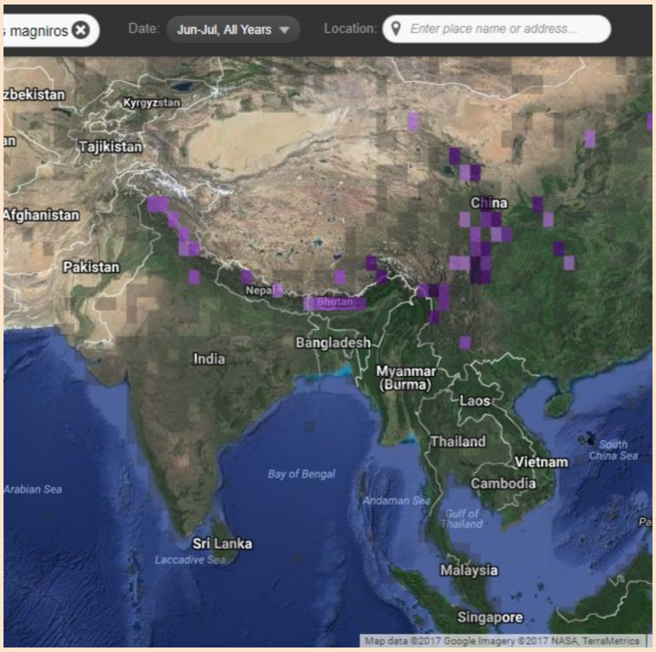


Photograph by Subrata Kool

Photograph by Pavan Kumar

Sighting of Large-billed Leaf Warbler

Migration Pattern: Following sighting range maps denote the way Large-billed Leaf Warblers migrate annually between the Indian subcontinent and central China. The maps are sourced from ebird database. The purple rectangles are reported sightings of the species.


magniros
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Location: Enter place name or address...
Uzbekistan
Kyrgyzstan
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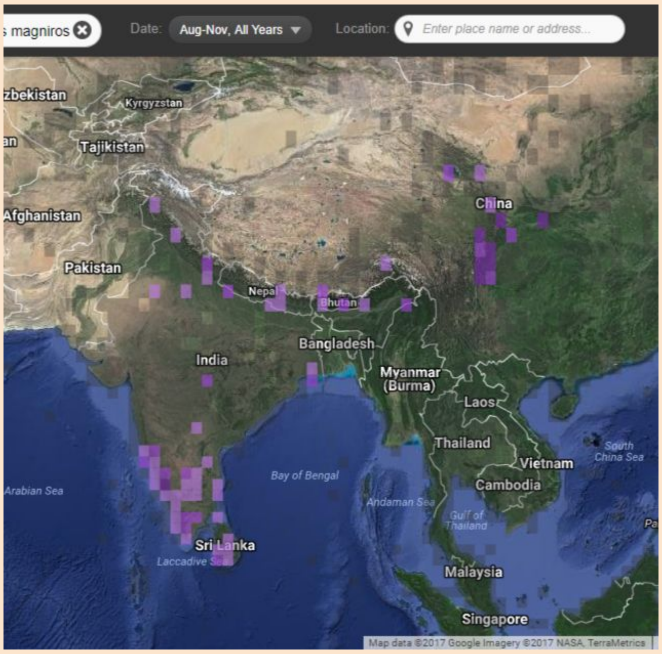
Afghanistan
Pakistan
China
Nepal
Bhutan
India
Bangladesh
Myanmar (Burma)
Laos
Thailand
Vietnam
Cambodia
Bay of Bengal
Arabian Sea
Andaman Sea
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea
Sri Lanka
Laccadive Sea
Malaysia
Singapore
Map data ©2017 Google Imagery ©2017 NASA, TerraMetrics

June to July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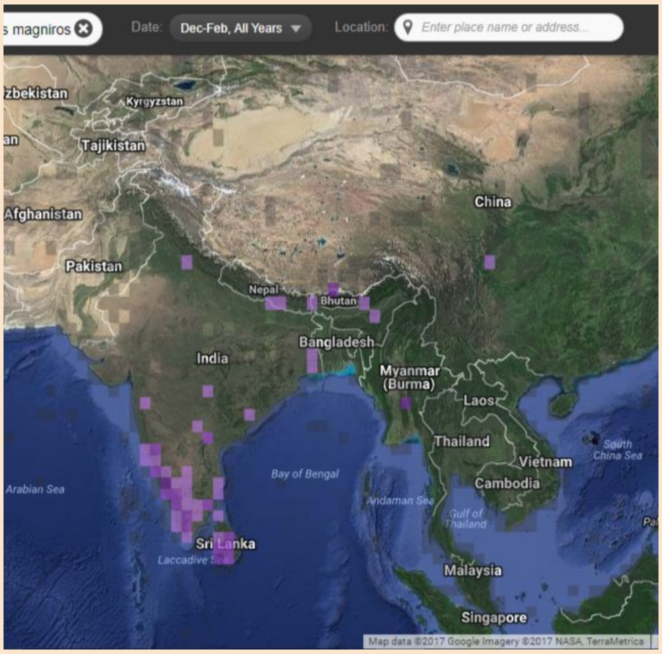
August to November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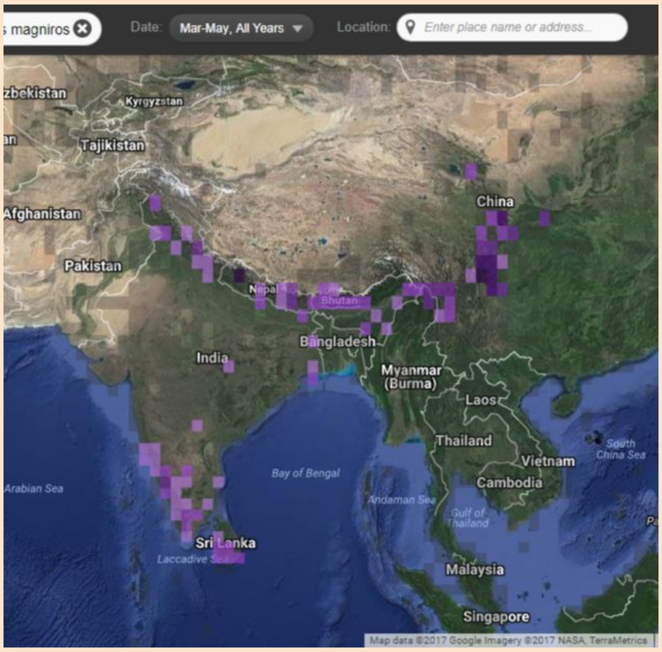
December to February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Map data ©2017 Google Imagery ©2017 NASA, TerraMetrics

March to May

Source: ebird.org

Making Bird Photographs Better

By Sriram Reddy

Are you just taking photographs or making photographs? There is a big difference between the two. By just pressing the shutter button you just take a picture. But making photographs is a lot more than just pressing shutter button. It a process that needs to be learned.

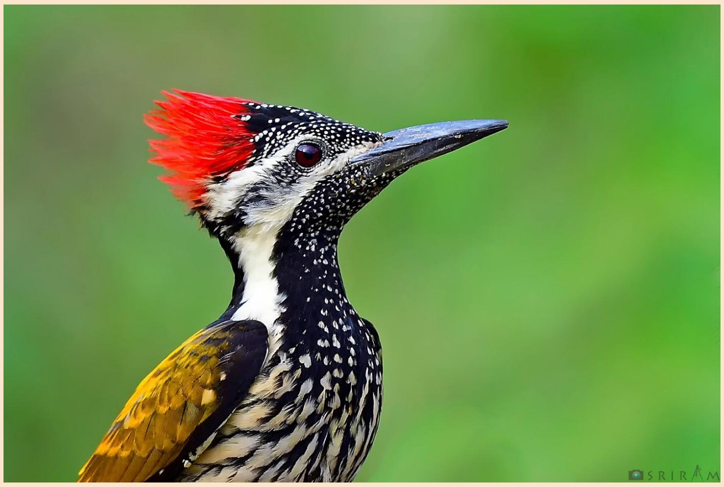
So what is the key to making a better bird photograph? Is it better camera and lenses? or a beautiful bird?

Making a better photograph of a bird is a great achievement as well as challenging part of wild photography. By using right technique and with little bit of practice you can drastically improve your bird photography.

Here are the basic tips for photographing a bird better:

1) Focus on bird's eye:

It is very much important to get eyes of a bird sharp. Bird photographs look most attractive when eyes are sharp. Out of focus eyes make you feel that something is missing in the image. Using single AF point you can precisely focus on eyes. All DSLRs have options to select multiple AF points. You can move and select any AF point that suits your composition.



2) Set your camera for back button focus:

Back button focus usually confuses photographers at first but once they “get it”, they will love it! This should be the first setting you need to do as a bird photographer. This has been quite possibly the biggest game changer in any photographer's journey. After this simple switch, I have noticed a remarkable difference in the accuracy of my focus.

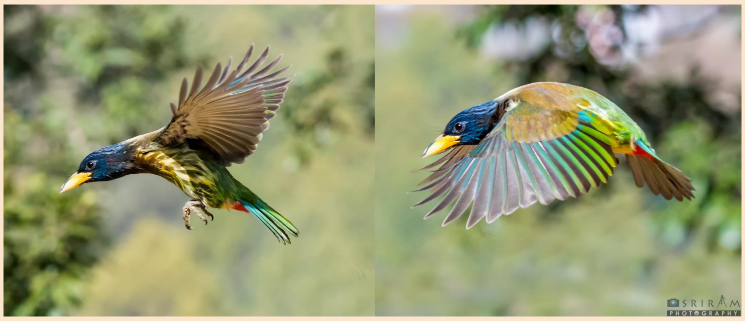
Most DSLR cameras, by default, set focus by pressing the shutter button halfway down. Back button focus simply changes the method of focusing by assigning the focus function to another button on the back of your camera. This means that your index finger is now solely responsible for taking

Making Bird Photographs Better

photographs, and your thumb is now responsible for focus.
Please google about how to set back button focus based on your camera body.

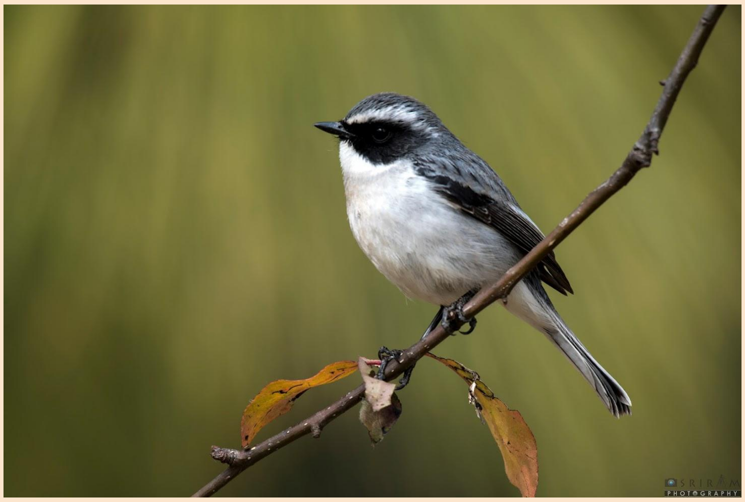
3) Use continuous shooting mode:
Always shoot in continuous shooting mode. It's also called burst mode.

It lets you capture multiple images in a given time frame. Most of the DSLRs can shoot 3 to 12 frames per second. The higher the rate, the better chances of getting a perfect photo. If a bird is taking off, landing or doing some action, just focus on eye(or bird) and fire and you will have sequence of images like in picture below.



Continuous Auto-Focus: if you are capturing a bird in flight, you can continuous auto-focus, which is called AF-C (Nikon)/ AI Servo AF (Canon). Very useful for tracking flying birds. It predicts the position of bird and focuses in advance, also called predictive auto-focus.

4) Background is important:
Always check the background when you are photographing a bird. Without proper background you are just taking record shots of a bird. Getting clean and smooth background makes bird stand out. Getting a nice, out of focus background is not always possible. It depends on where the bird is sitting and how far that background is from the bird. Farther the background, the more out of focus it will be.



To achieve smoother background you can try following.

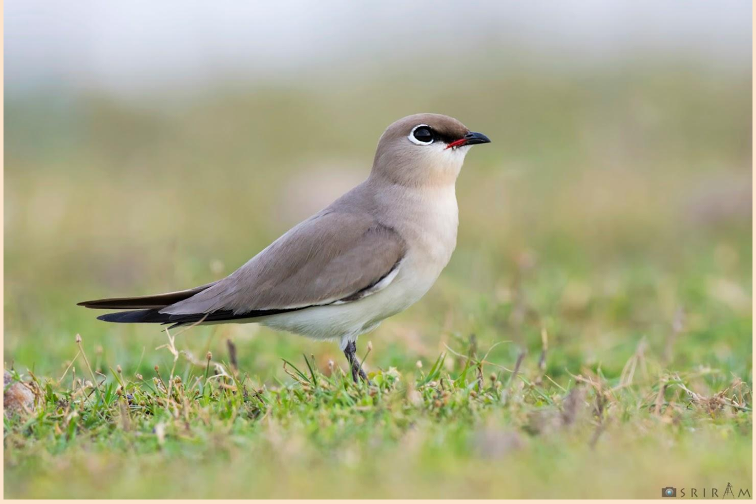
Try changing shooting angle: A slight change in angle sometimes gives a background. Try to move left-right or up-down to get the best available background.

Use Wider Aperture: Wider the aperture, the more out of focus background you will get. Using wide aperture (small F-Number) results in shallow depth of field. But this comes with a drawback. Shallower depth of field can make the bird partially out of focus. For example if you are focusing on the middle body of a bird as it's not always possible to focus on eyes as said above, the farthest and the nearest part from the focus point can go soft.

Making Bird Photographs Better

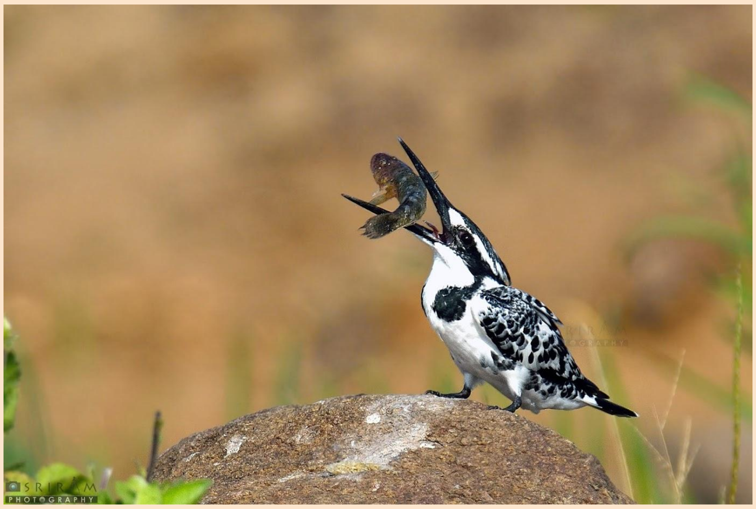
5) Always shoot at eye level:

Point your camera at or near the level of bird eyes. Capturing photographs at eye level can drastically improve the quality of image. If the bird is on the ground, you need to lie down on the ground. This technique allows you to get a nice smooth & blur background. If bird is above you, nothing much can be done.



6) Shoot at faster shutter speed:

Birds are always on the move specially the smaller one. They just don't sit at one place. Use faster shutter speed to freeze the bird in action and helps in getting a bird sharp. Slower shutter speeds can result into blurry images. To avoid blurry images try shooting at 1/400s or above shutter speeds.



Sometimes light do not permit to use fast shutter speed. You can try using wider aperture or high ISO.

Using widest aperture(small F-number) allow more light to travel in.

Bumping up ISO increases camera sensor's sensitivity to the light. This way the sensor requires less light to create an image. In lower end DSLRs you can boost upto ISO 800. If required use ISO 1600 or above. Many times noisy images are always better than blurry images. You can also use noise removal tools to reduce noise.

7) Patience pays off:

Be Patient and wait for the right moment. Please avoid sudden movements, the slightest noise or movement may scare the bird and it may ruin your best photographic moment. Spending time with the bird helps you earn the trust of the bird. Do not rush towards the bird. Birds do come close to you if you stay calm and patient.

Making Bird Photographs Better

It's good idea to survey the location that you think can provide better photo opportunity. Make a note where the birds are showing up most and what direction they are flying. It will help you to decide where to set up your camera.

Birds are mostly active in early morning or evening. Get up before sun rise and set yourself for the angle that suits you at the place you examined before.

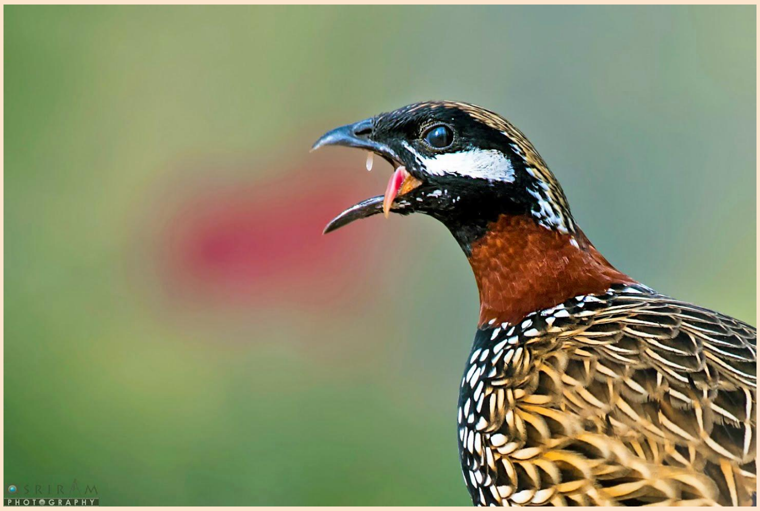
8) Photograph birds in action:

Capturing bird moods and action will make you move your photography to advance level. Capture them while they are in flight, preening, fighting, foraging, displaying or mating etc. This kind of shots have story in them.

Skills and observations are very important to get the best action. Sometimes a great opportunity presents itself and skills are of prime importance. Some pictures, however, are the result of pure luck. Observation helps you predict the next action the bird is going to take, and you will be ready to capture that moment.

One of the easiest things to be mindful of while photographing birds in action is to leave more space in the direction the bird is looking or flying.

The best place to start action photography is in your own backyard. By simply creating a bird-friendly environment with a feeder and birdbath, you can capture the moods and behavior of birds. This is a good way to improve your technical and composition skills without having to make a substantial investment in travel.



Birds & Bears of Hampi-Daroji

By Sriram Reddy

A trip to Hampi is pending since long time and I had an opportunity to go there for 3 days. The main aim of the trip was to see woodland birds particularly painted sandgrouse and bears of Daroji. Hampi, the World heritage site in Bellary - Karnataka, may be a hot destination for tourists seeking architectural grandeur in the ruins of the Vijayanagar Empire. Not only the architecture, It's the birds and bears which made me travel to this place. I need to thank Mr. Pompayya Malenath for his on field guidance and logistics support. A humble man with amazing knowledge on birds, wildlife and terrain of that region. Without his support, this trip will not have been a fruitful one .

Hampi is located in northern Karnataka. It is situated on the banks of the Tungabhadra River. It is 370 km from Hyderabad, 353 km from Bangalore and 74 km from Bellary. Hosapete (Hospet), 13 km away, is the nearest railway station.

The Bombay Natural History Society and BirdLife International have selected Hampi as an Important Bird Area (IBA) as it holds a significant population of the yellow-throated bulbul, a globally threatened species.

The varied landscape of Hampi — rocky boulders, small lakes, the Tungabhadra reservoir, canals, dry scrub jungle — all provide ample habitat for a variety of birds. A large number of winter migratory birds visit this place every year. Around 230 species of birds are found in this place.

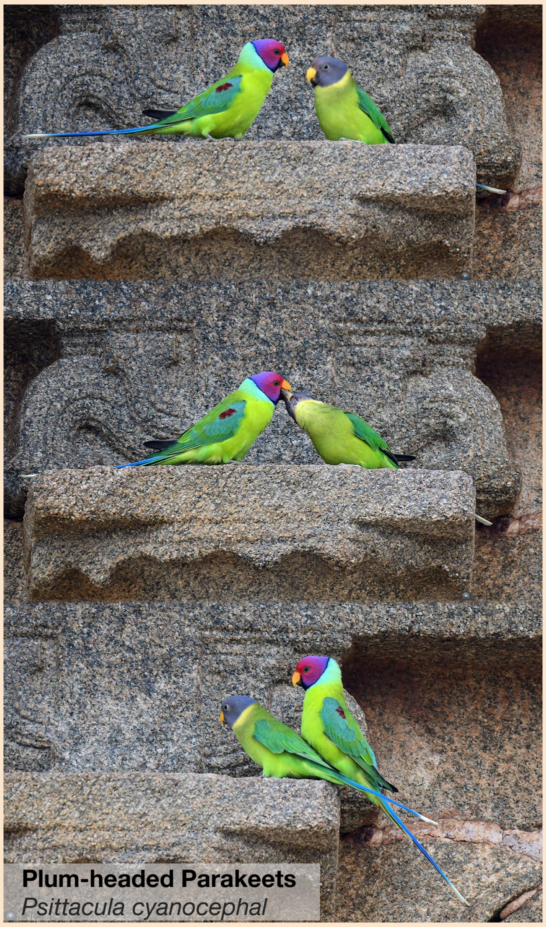
Hampi is a unique place for birds. Photographers will get opportunities to capture birds with beautiful architecture in the background. Vittala temple(15° 20' 19.1198'' N, 76° 27' 32.0422'' E) is a perfect place to photograph Rose-ringed parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*), Plum-headed parakeets (*Psittacula roseata*), Spotted owlets (*Athene brama*). Security guards in this place may sometimes object the photographers with long lens.

Shikra
Accipiter badius

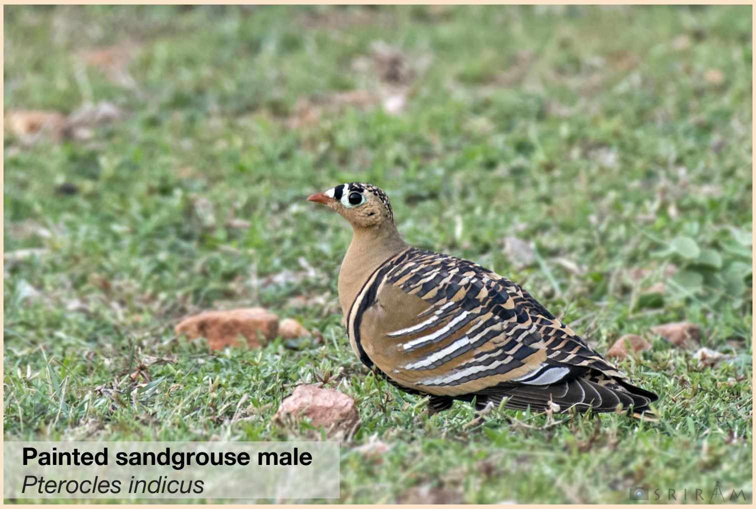
Spotted Owlets
Athene brama

Birds & Bears of Hampi-Daroji

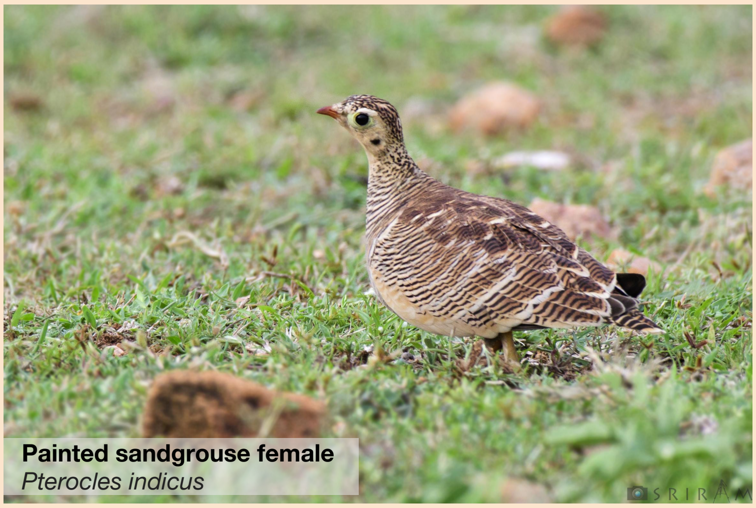
The terrain surrounding the Kannada University(15° 16' 45.7666'' N, 76° 28' 53.2358'' E) is a very good habitat for Painted sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*), common babblers (*Turdoides caudata*) and grey francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*).



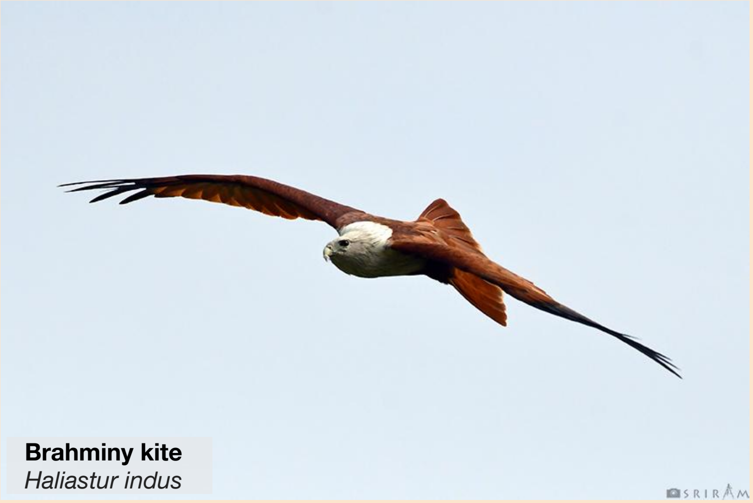
Plum-headed Parakeets
Psittacula cyanocephal



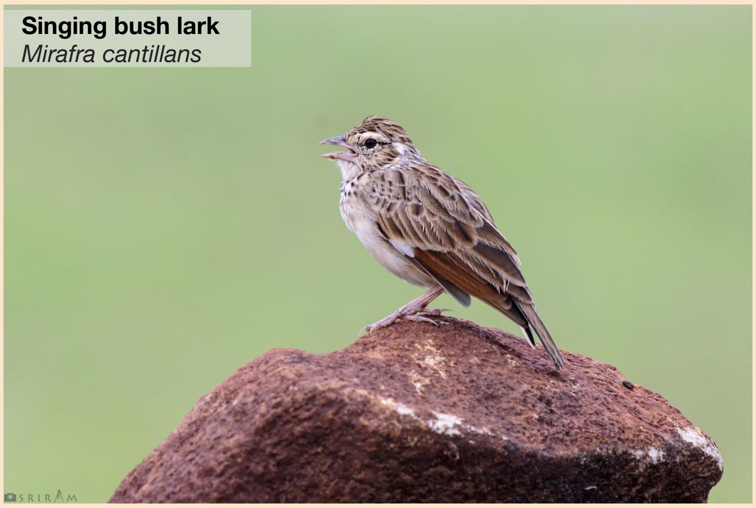
Painted sandgrouse male
Pterocles indicus



Painted sandgrouse female
Pterocles indicus



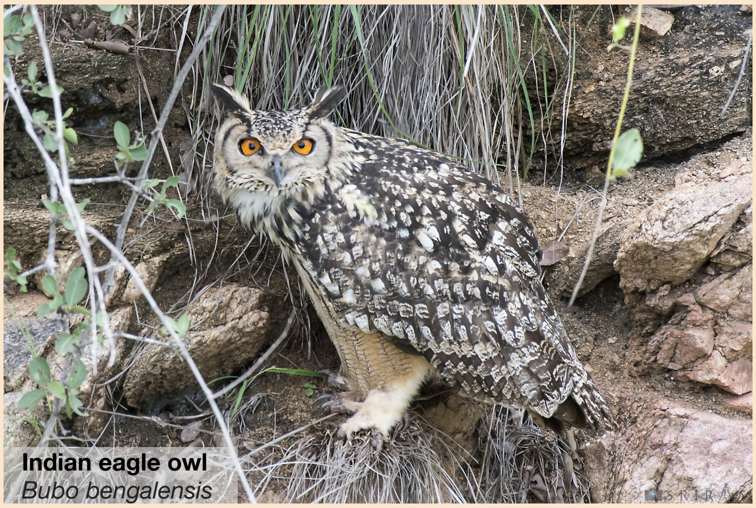
Brahminy kite
Haliastur indus



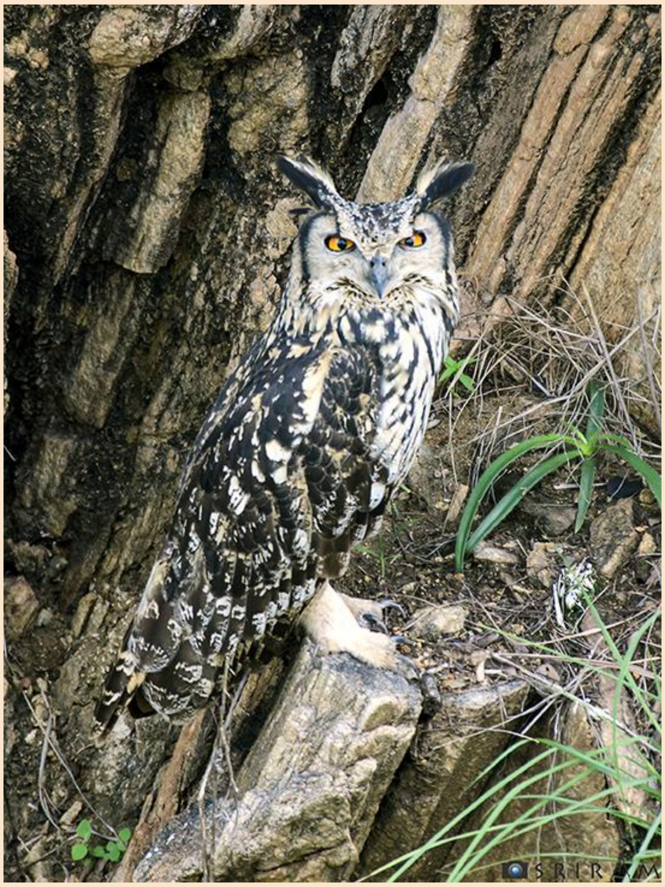
Singing bush lark
Mirafra cantillans

Birds & Bears of Hampi-Daroji

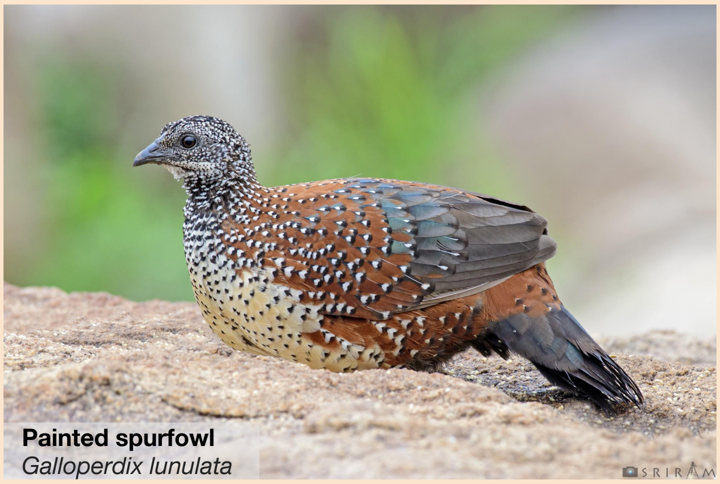
The muddy road on the edge of Tunga canal(15.2766086N ,76.4837543E) is a good habitat for Indian Eagle Owls (*Bubo bengalensis*) which apparently are resident species. The rocky sides of the canal yielded couple of deadly looking owls who evaded for quite sometime, but eventually posed nicely. Canal side birding was an absolute experience.



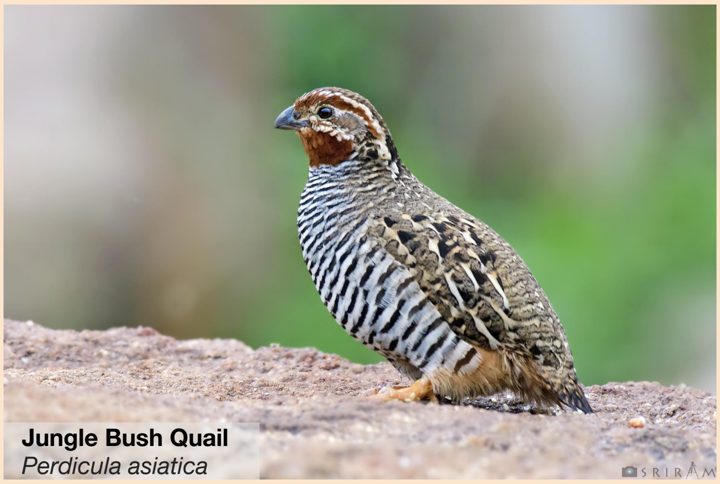
Indian eagle owl
Bubo bengalensis



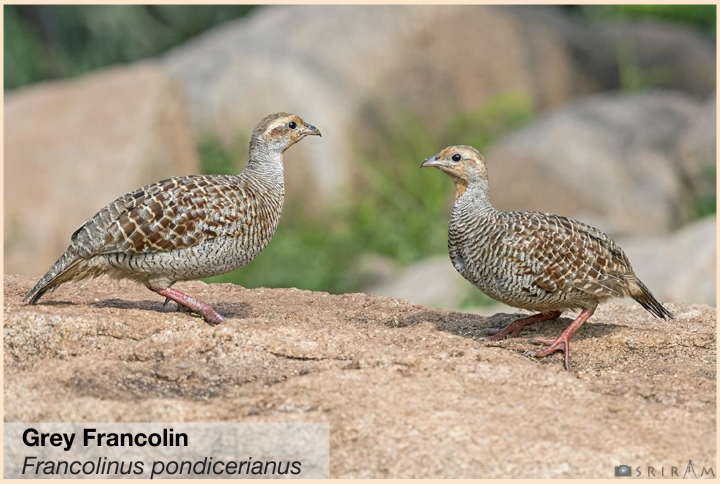
Nisarga Dhama Nature Camp (15.2727242,76.4828949) is another interesting and a good place for photographers. Painted spurfowl, Jungle Bush Quail, Rock Bush Quail, Barred buttonquail, Grey Francolins family, Indian Peafowls visit this place every morning.



Painted spurfowl
Galloperdix lunulata



Jungle Bush Quail
Perdicula asiatica



Grey Francolin
Francolinus pondicerianus

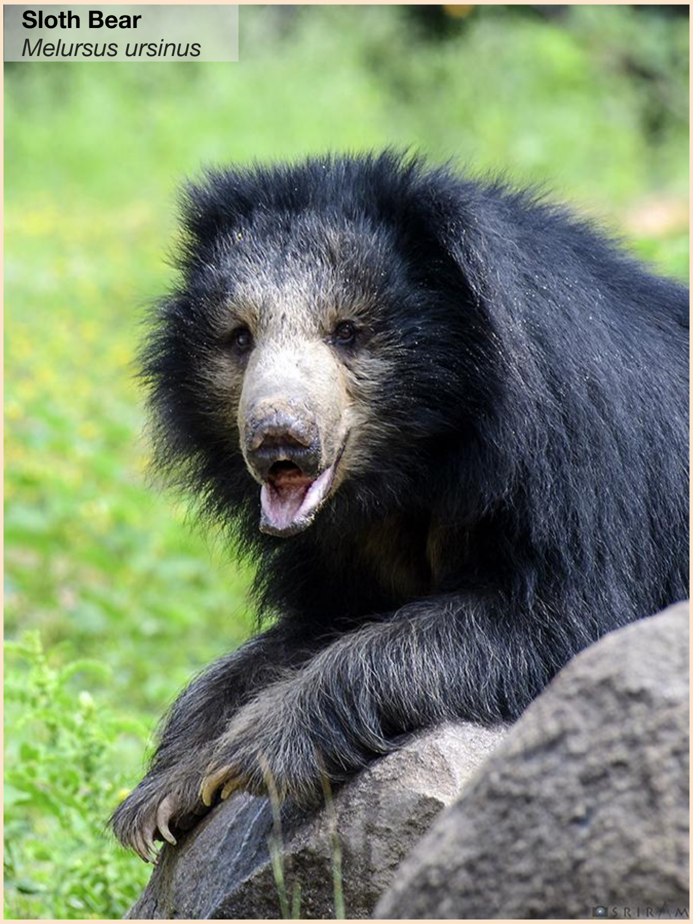
Birds & Bears of Hampi-Daroji

Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary (15° 16' 10.699'' N, 76° 31' 45.0851'' E) is located 15 km from the Hampi. It is spread over an area of 82.72 km^2. The sanctuary was created exclusively for the preservation of the sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*). Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary is the first sloth bear sanctuary in Asia.

The flora of this sanctuary is primarily dry deciduous scrub and Southern thorn forests. At the time of declaration of the sanctuary, it was a large area of barren hillocks, but persistent efforts from Karnataka Forest Department have transformed the area into lush green forest, filled with local flora.

Sloth bears family
Melursus ursinus

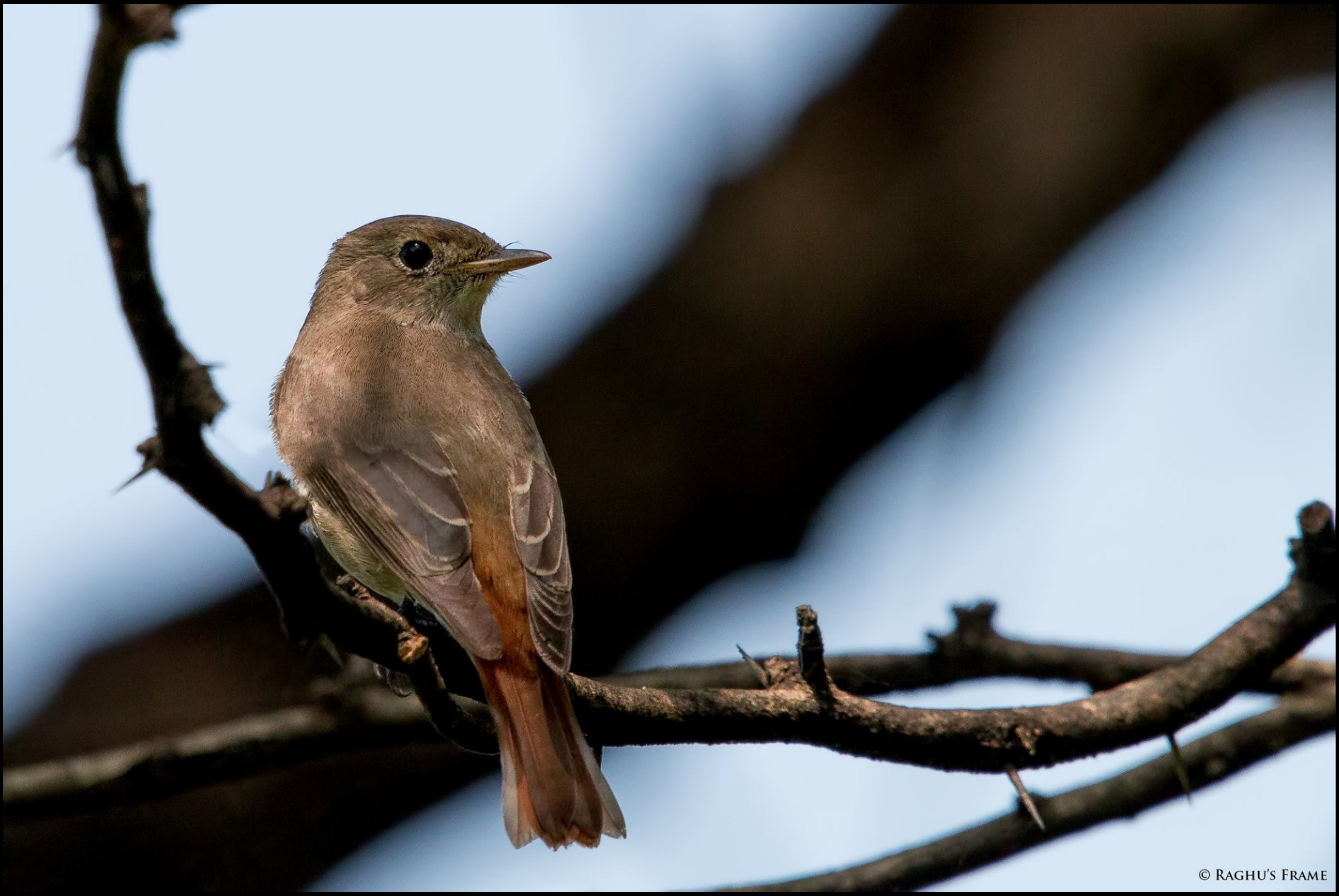
The sanctuary's flagship species is the Indian sloth bear. It has a very stable population of sloth bears and they reside in the numerous caves found in the hillocks within the sanctuary. leopards, monitor lizards, mongoose, pangolins, star tortoises etc. are some of the other animals that abound in the sanctuary.


Sloth Bear
Melursus ursinus

It is estimated that about 150 Sloth Bears are living in this sanctuary, apart from Leopards, Hyenas, Jackals, Wild Boars, Porcupines, Pangolins, Star Tortoises, Monitor Lizards, Mongooses, Painted Spurfowls, Quails etc. About 90 species of birds, and 27 species of butterflies have also been identified in this sanctuary in a preliminary survey.

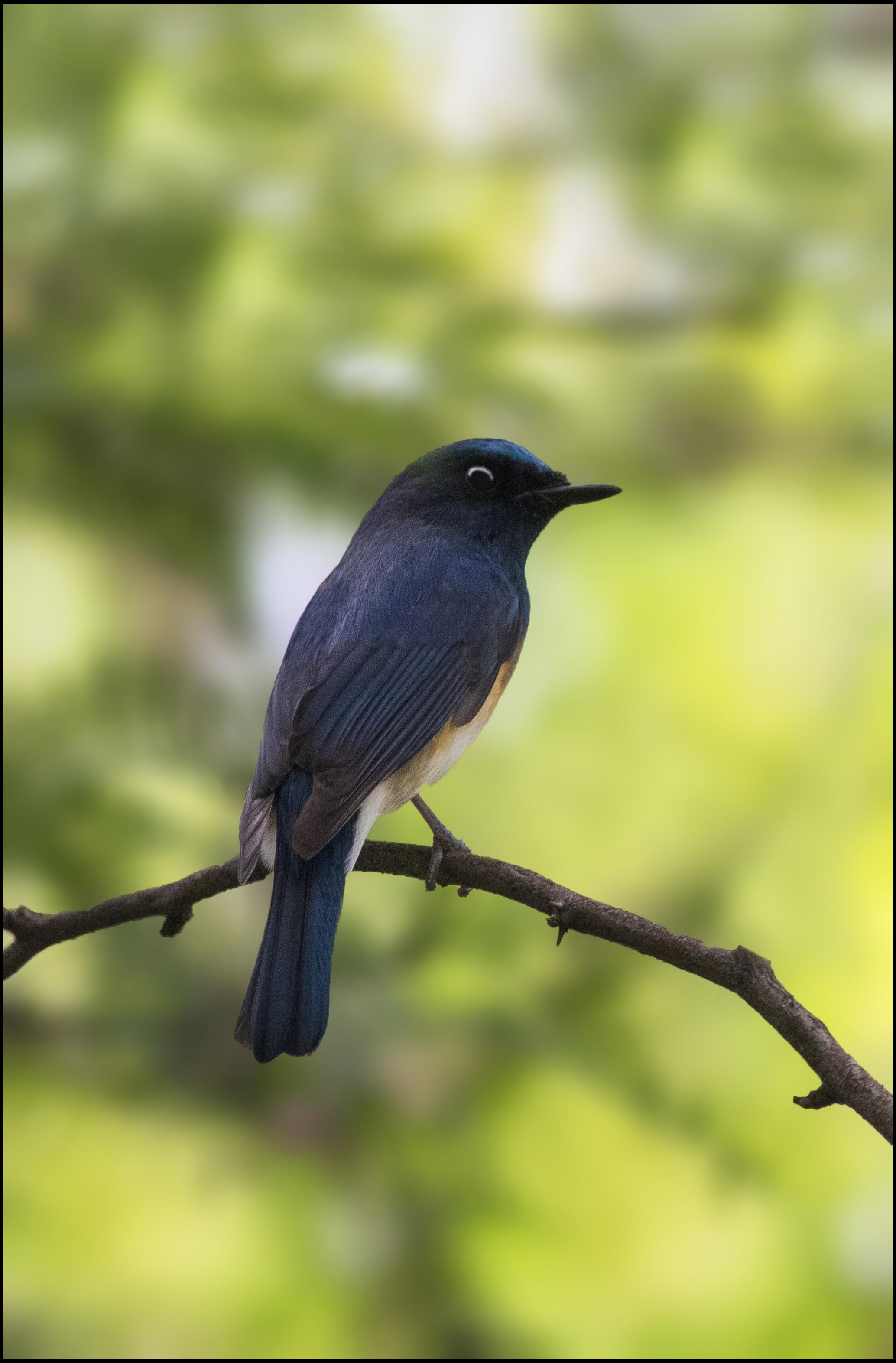
Visiting hours of the sanctuary is between 2 PM and 6PM on all days. To watch the Bears one must be in the watch-tower on a hillock and sit quietly to look at the Bears descending from the opposite Karadikallu Gudda. This hillock has hundreds of caves where the Bears take shelter.

Important Sightings



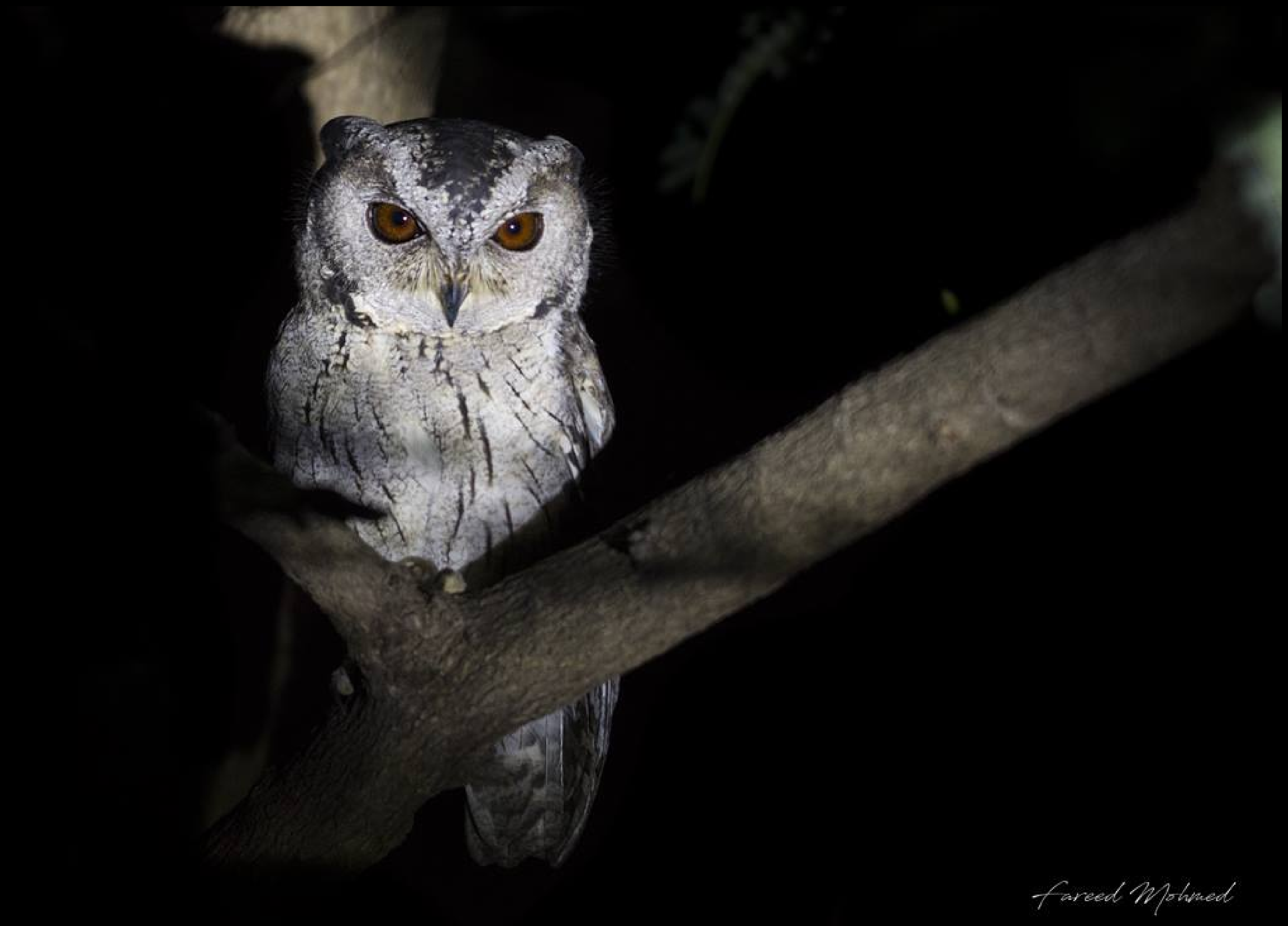
Rusty Tailed Flycatcher
(*Ficedula ruficauda*)
Osmania University
Raghu Nathan

Important Sightings



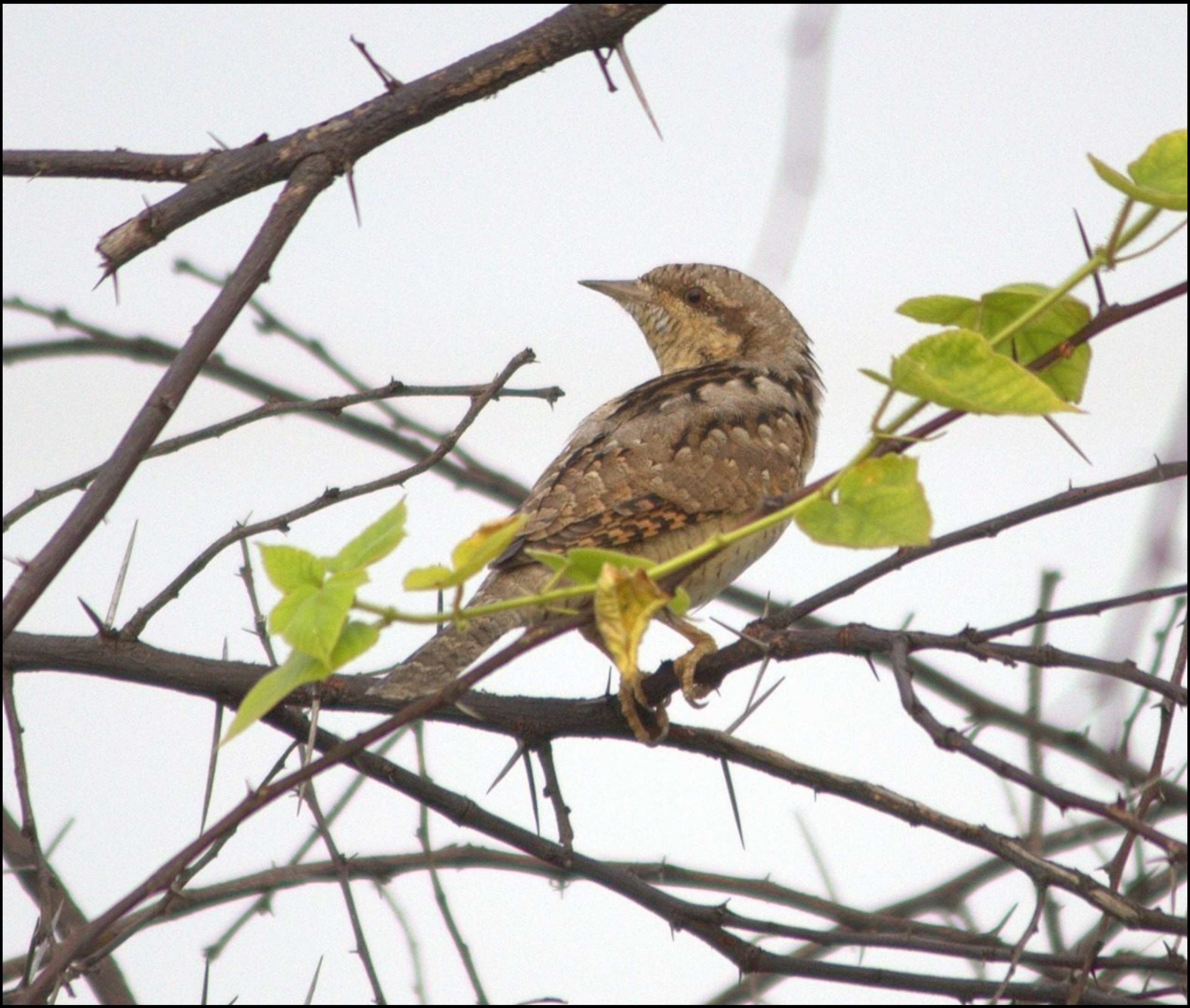
Blue throated blue flycatcher
(*Cyornis rubeculoides*)
National Police Academy
Abhishek Ravindra

Important Sightings



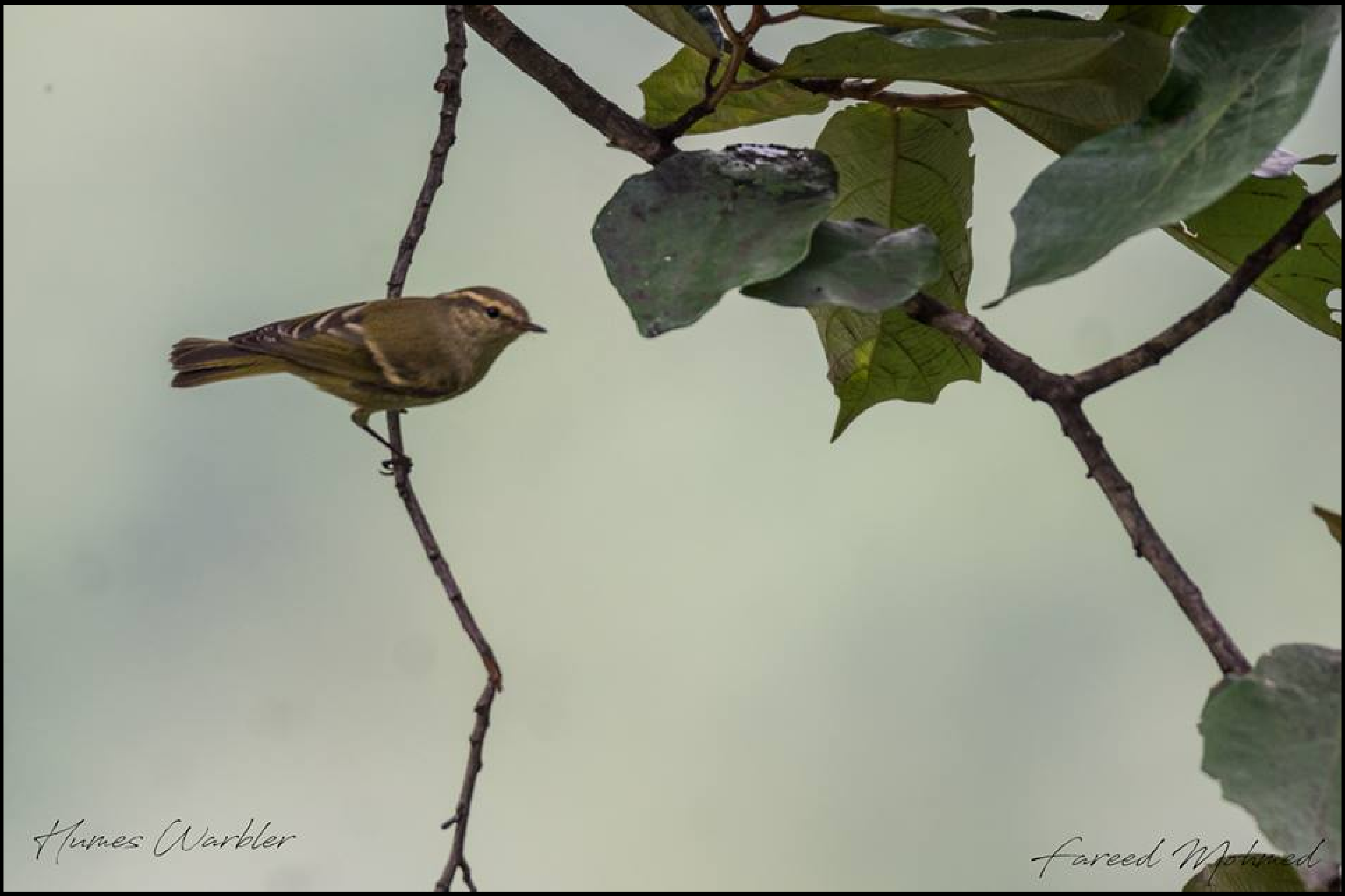
Indian Scops Owl
(*Otus bakkamoena*)
Amarabad Tiger Reserve
Fareed Mohmed

Important Sightings



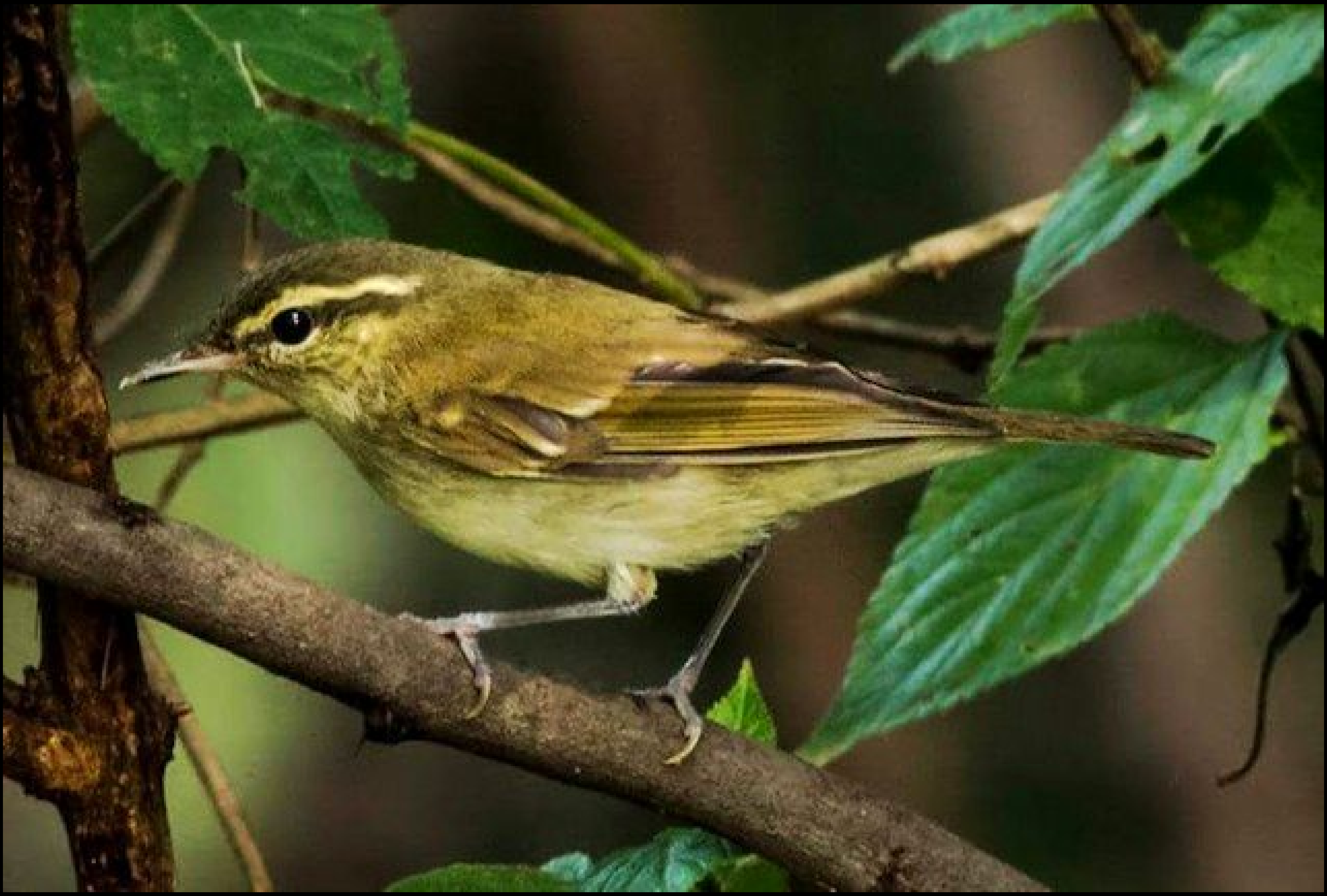
Eurasian Wryneck
(*Jynx torquilla*)
Fox Sagar
Naveen Sama

Important Sightings


Humes Warbler
Fareed Mohmed

Hume's leaf warbler
(*Phylloscopus humei*)
Amarabad Tiger Reserve
Fareed Mohmed

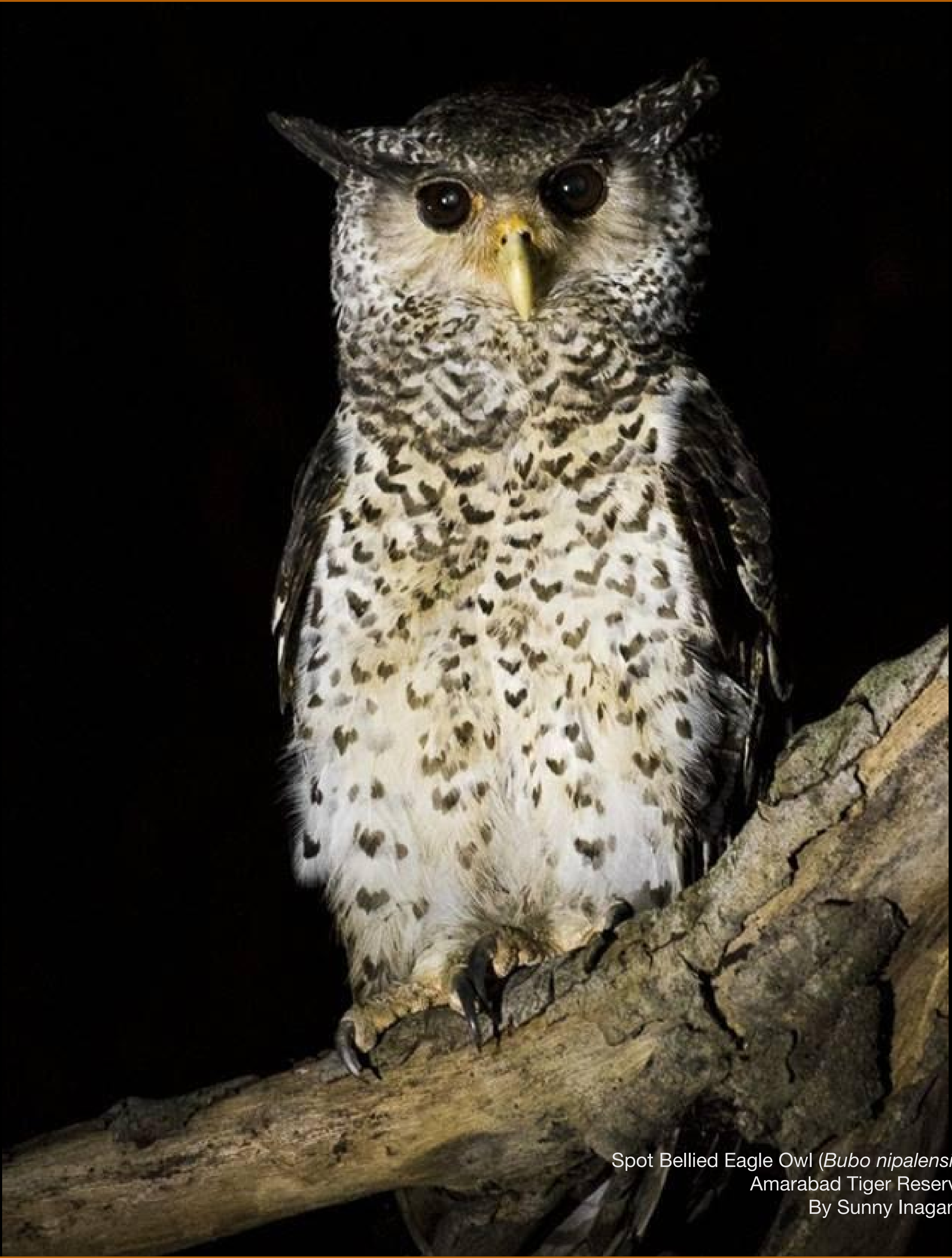
Important Sightings



Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*)

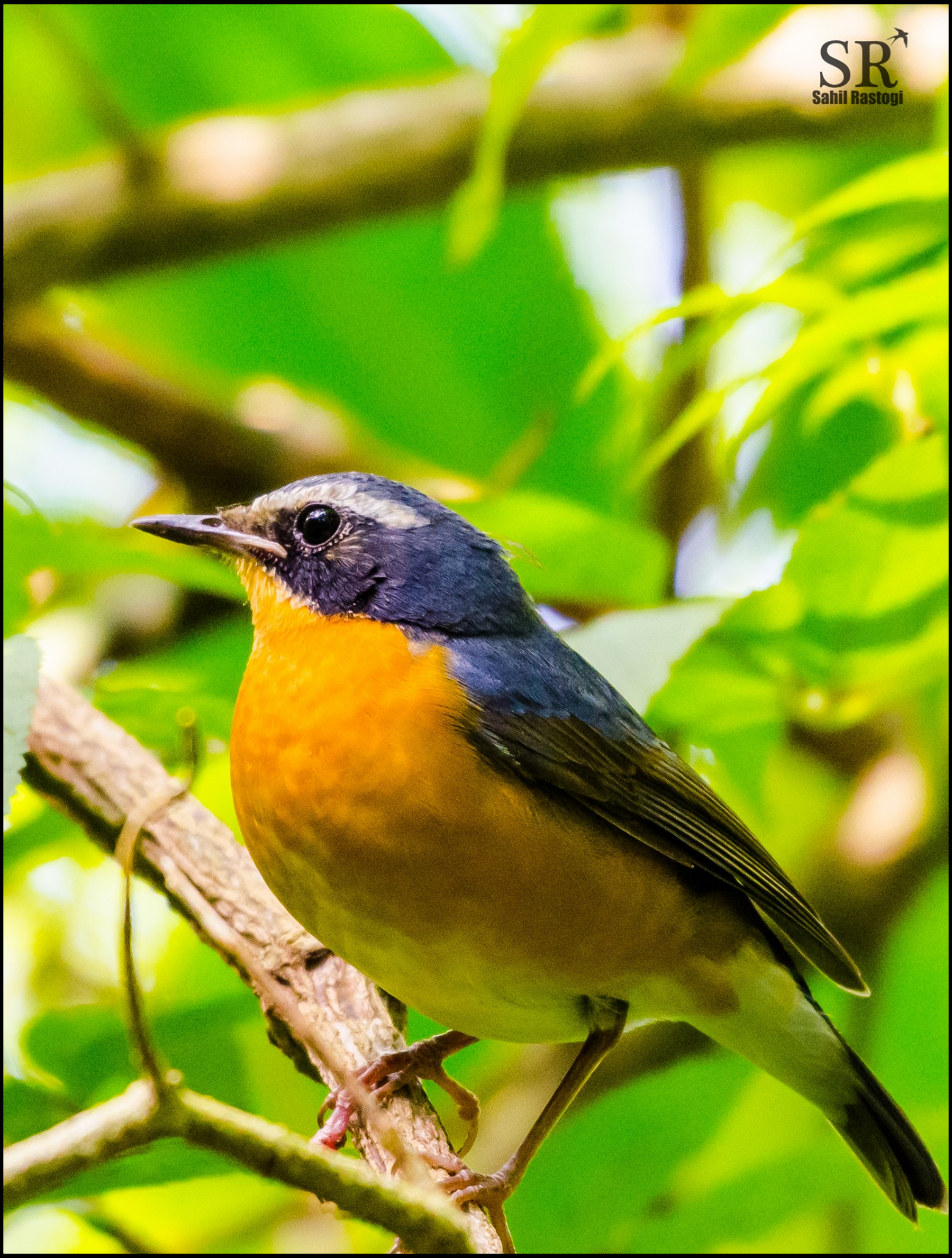
Subrata Kool
Manjeera Reservoir, TS

Important Sightings



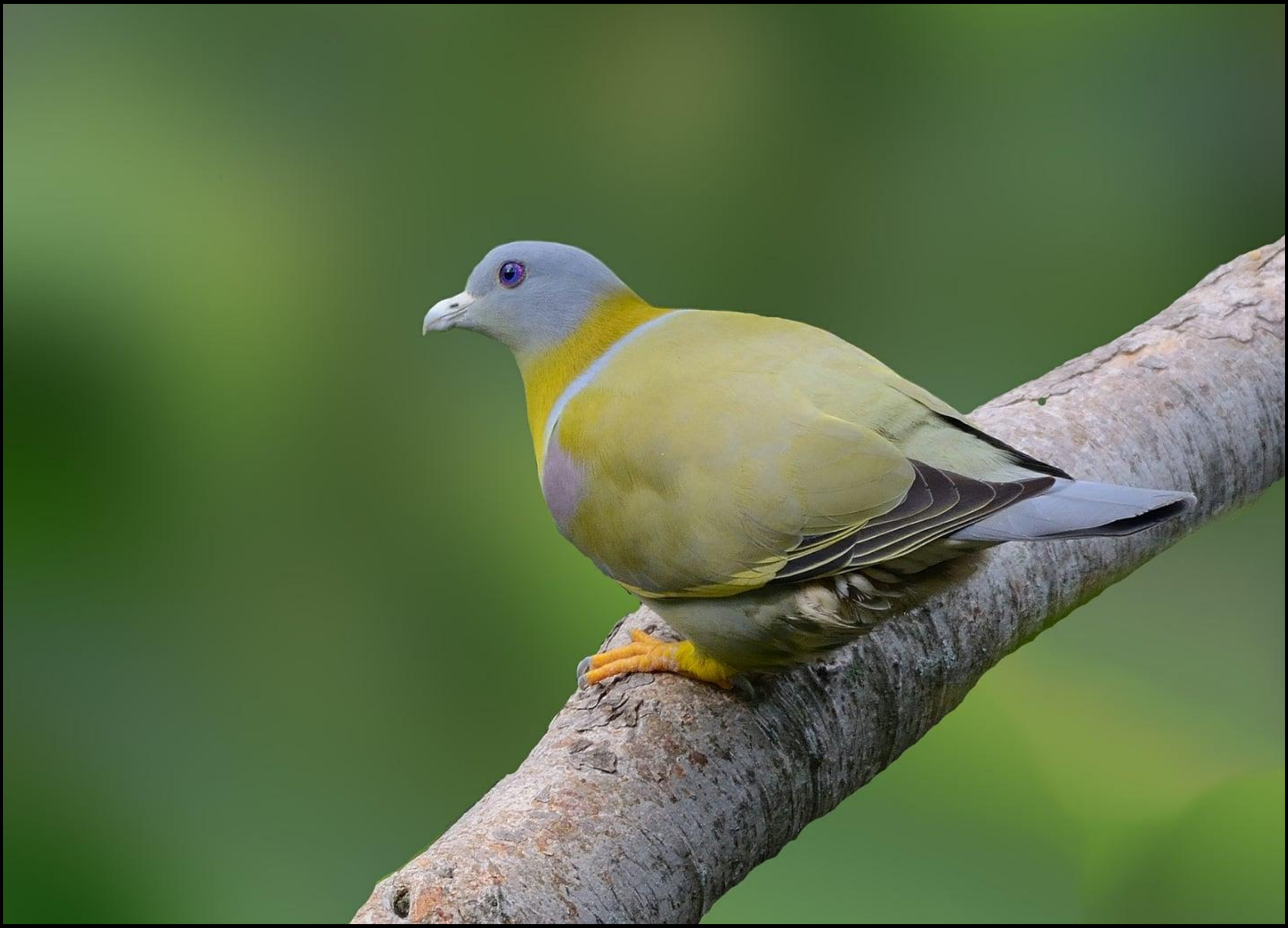
Spot Bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*)
Amarabad Tiger Reserve
By Sunny Inaganti

Photographer's Corner



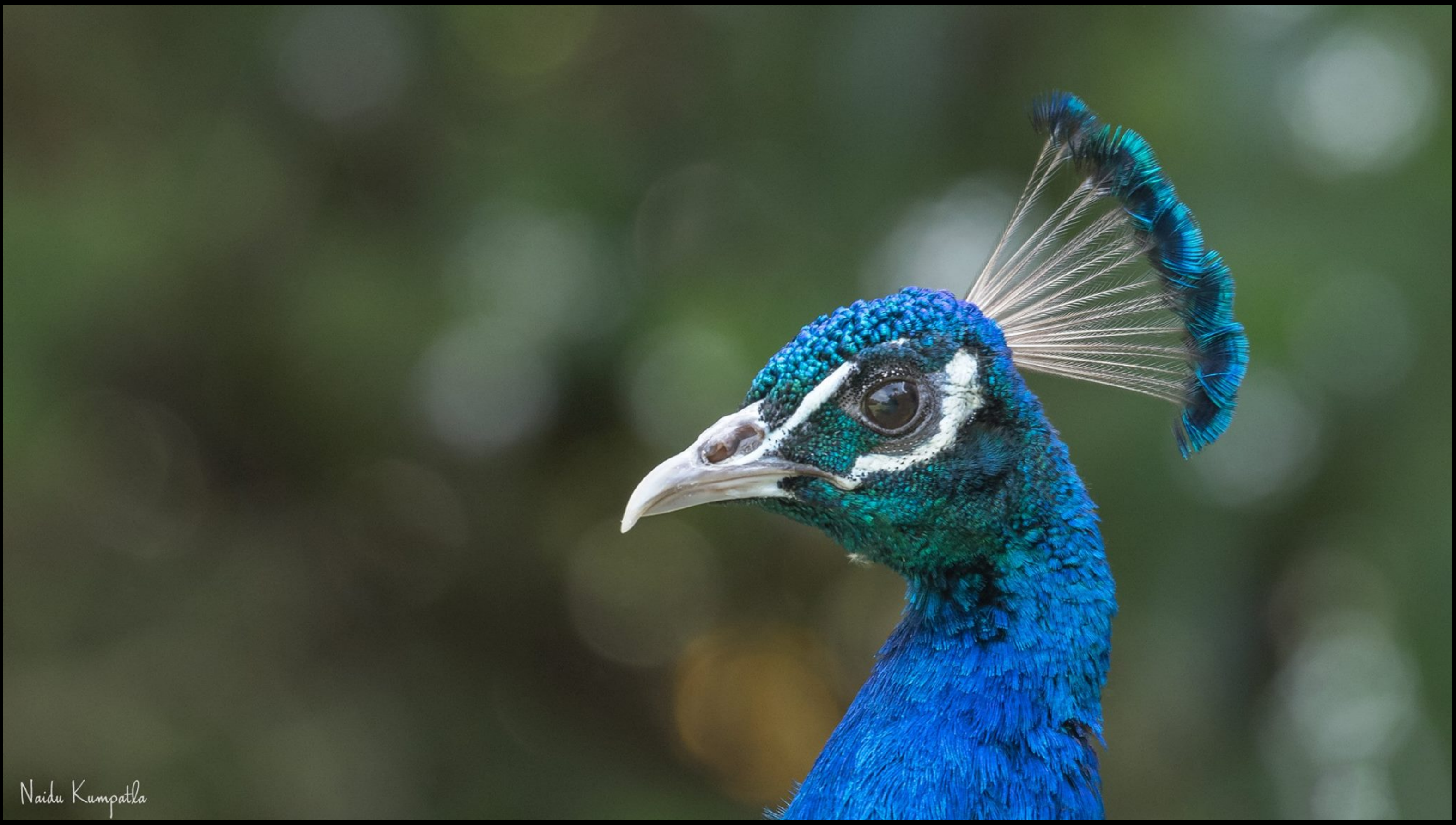
Indian Blue Robin (*Luscinia brunnea*)
Bangalore
By Sahil Rastogi

Photographer's Corner



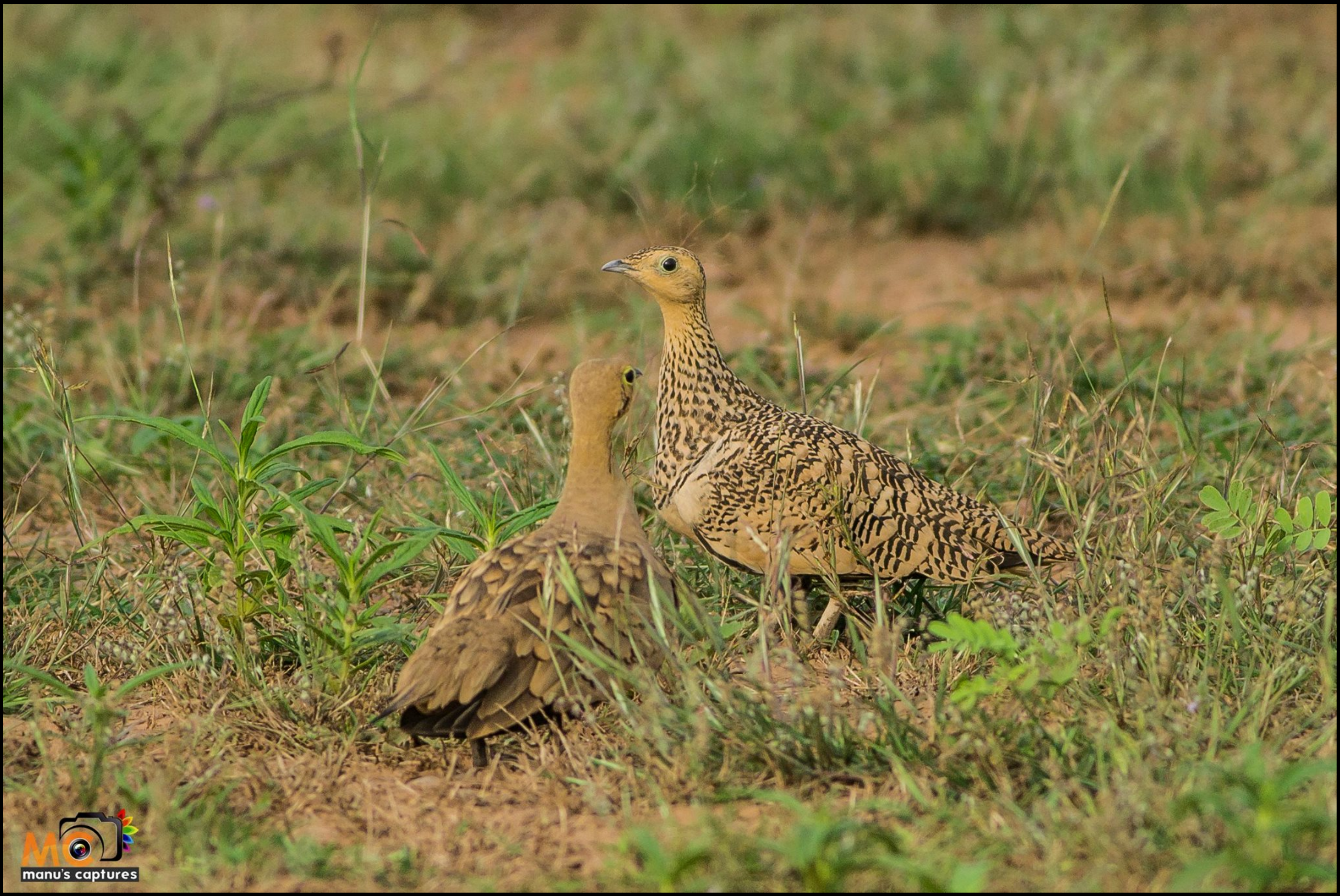
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
(*Treron phoenicopterus*)
Amarabad Tiger Reserve
Mohit Joshi

Photographer's Corner


Naidu Kumpatla

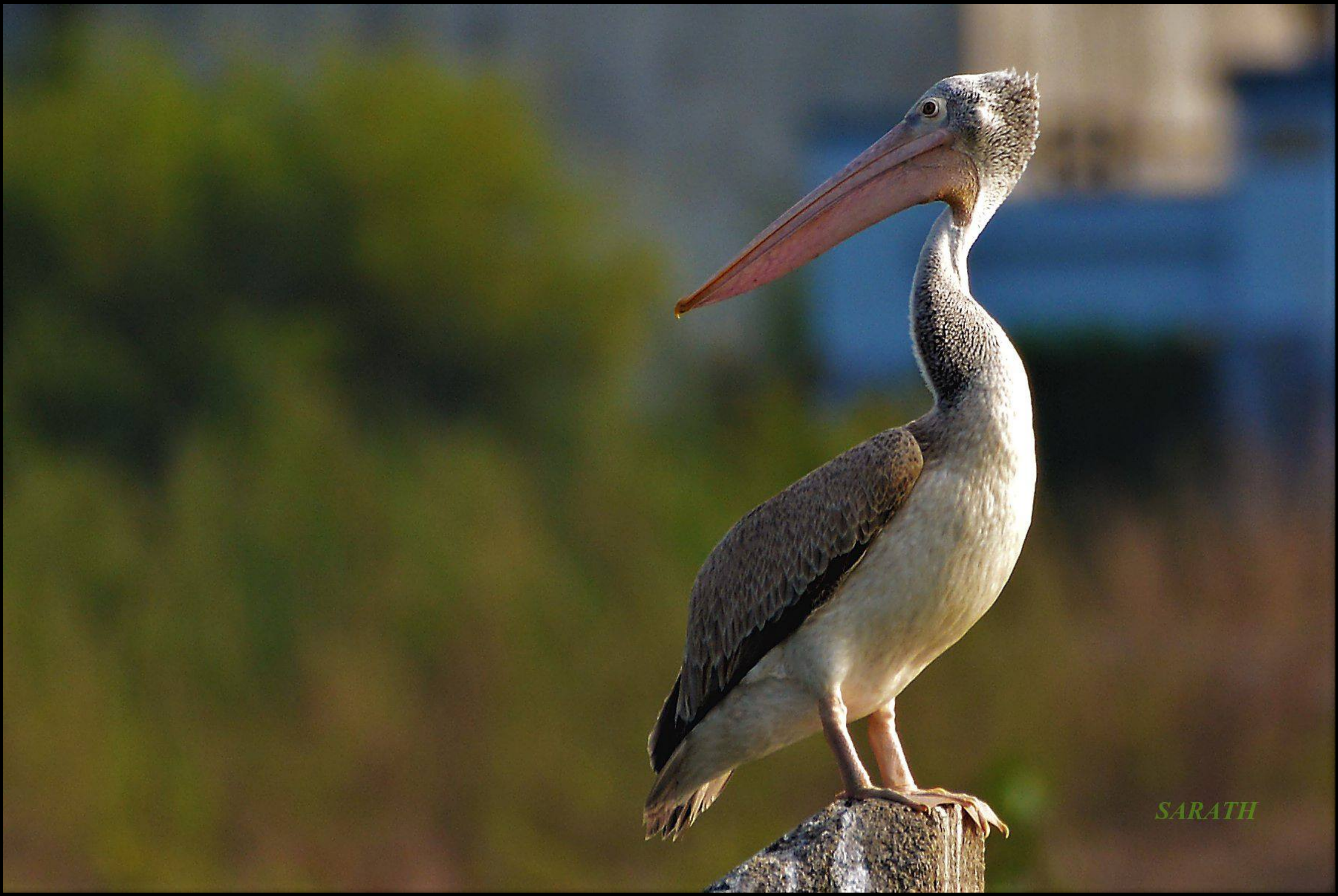
Peafowl
Australia
Naidu Kumpatla

Photographer's Corner



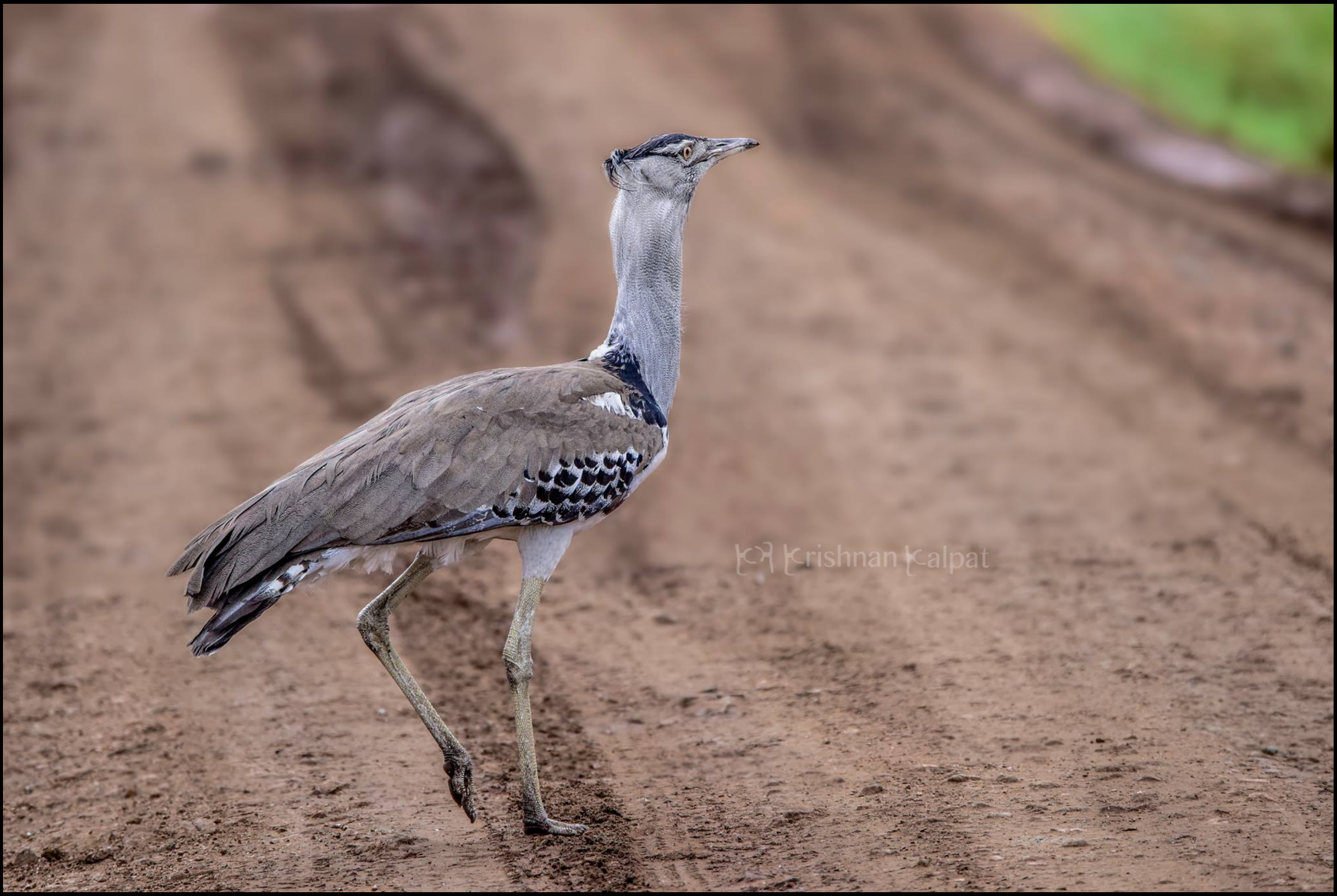
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
(*Pterocles exustus*)
Kurnool
Manoj Kumar

Photographer's Corner



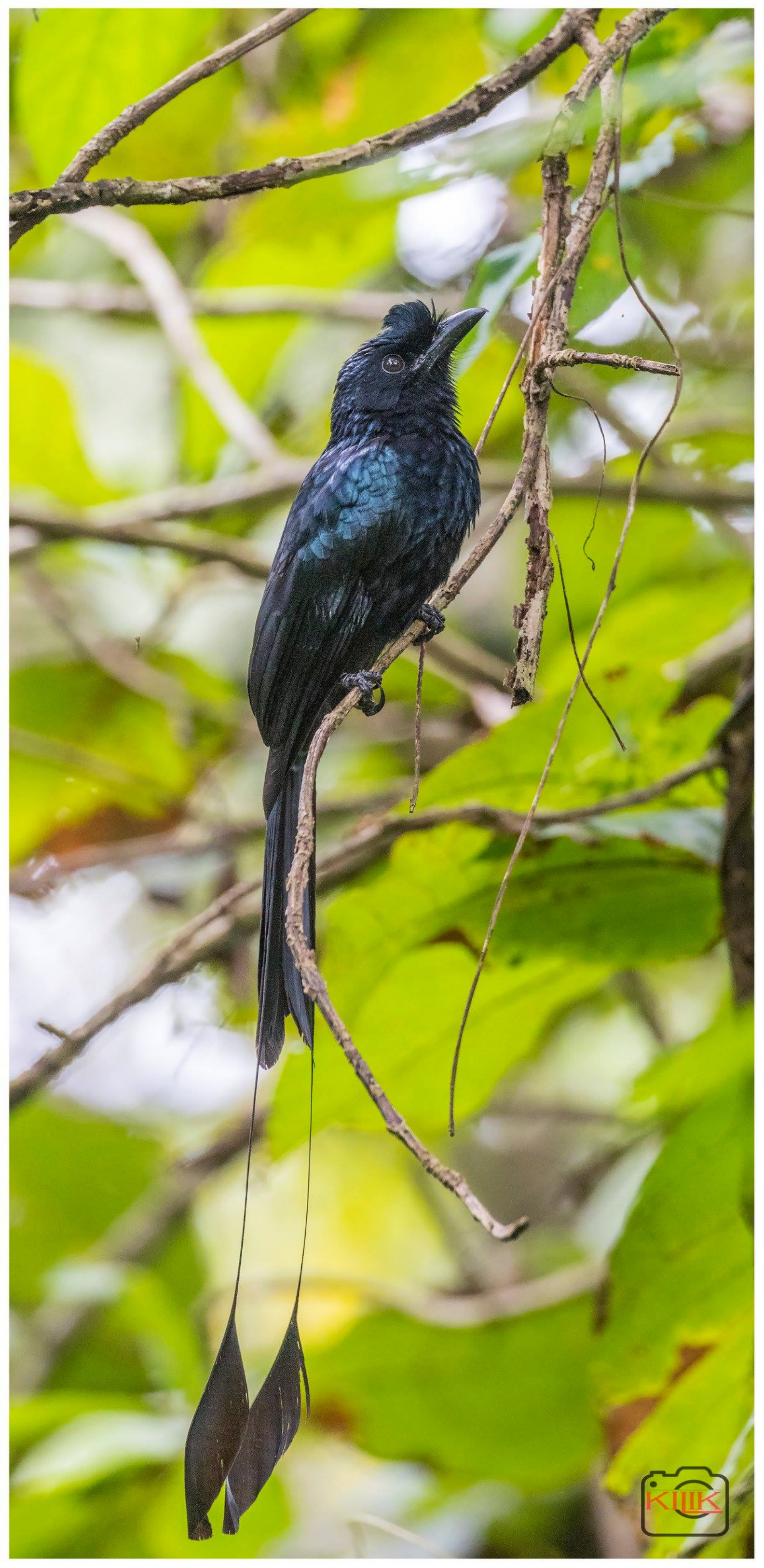
Spot-billed Pelican
(*Pelecanus philippensis*)
Ameenpur
Sarath babu

Photographer's Corner



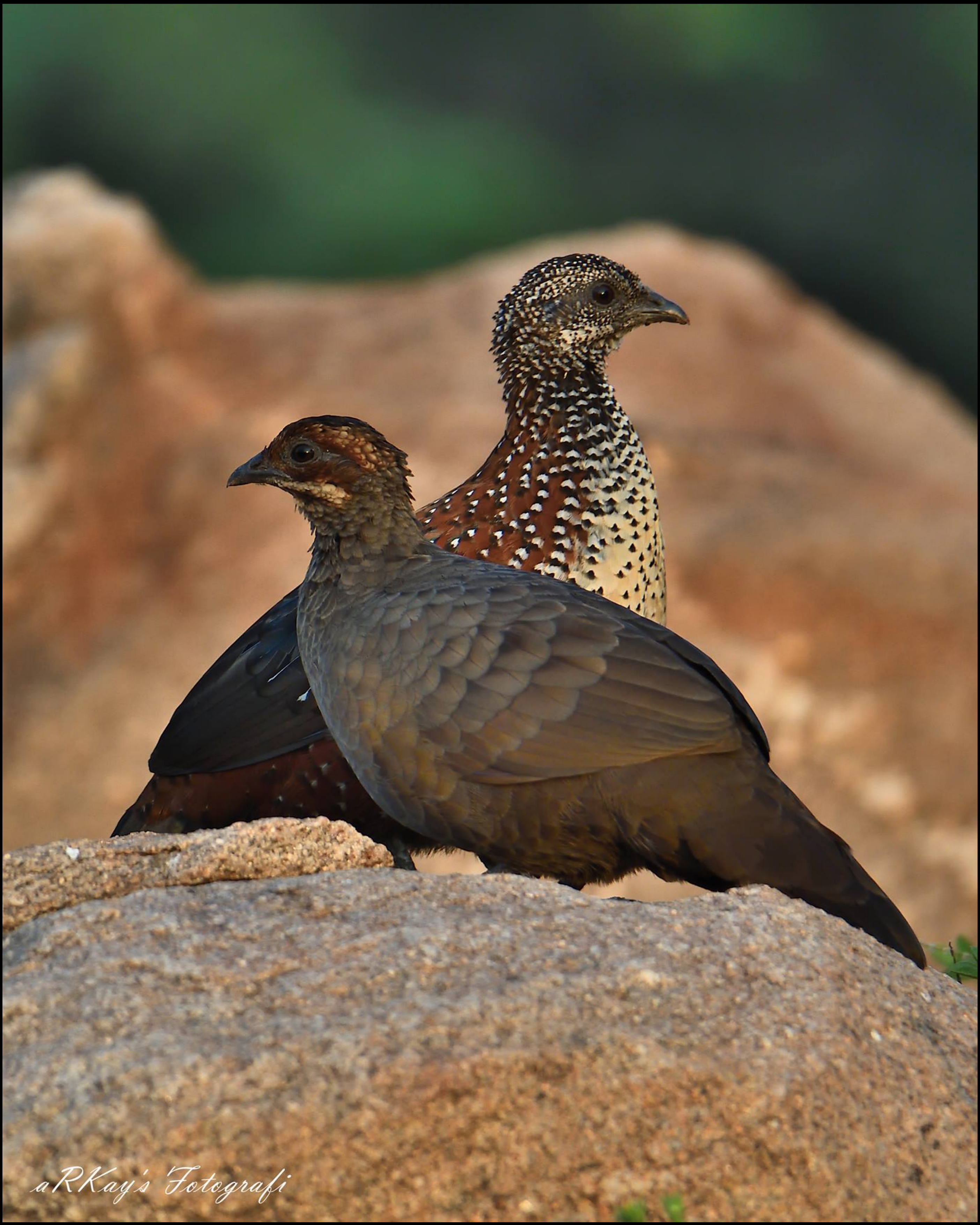
Kori Bustard (*Ardeotis kori*)
Masai Mara National Reserve
Krishnan Kalpat

Photographer's Corner



Greater Racket-tailed drongo
(*Dicrurus paradiseus*)
Thattekad
Kishore Bakshi

Photographer's Corner


aRKay's Fotografi

Painted Spurfowl
(*Galloperdix lunulata*)
Hampi
Ramakrishna

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